VIDEHA · PARALLEL LITERARY MOVEMENT

A PARALLEL HISTORY

of Mithilā & Maithilī Literature

PART IV · TOME XI

with Critical Appreciations of Representative Maithili Writers

Translated from original Maithili by the author himself

GAJENDRA THAKUR

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Editor, Videha eJournal

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with Critical Appreciations of Representative Maithili Writers

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DEDICATION

for the writers, readers, and listeners of Mithilā,
who have kept the lamp of Maithilī burning
through a thousand years of storms

"The Parallel is not the marginal,
but the truthful, in long delay."

Mānuṣīm iha saṃskṛtām

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The Nepal Bikram Samvat years cited have been converted to approximate CE years using the standard offset of BS minus 56–57 years.

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Dhūrtasamāgama: Text, Adaptation, and Theatrical Practice

Introduction: The Two Lives of a Farce

To describe *Dhūrtasamāgama* merely as "the first Maithili play" would be to diminish the complexity of its theatrical life. One life of this work unfolded within the manuscript tradition, Sanskrit-Prakrit dialogue, Maithili songs, and the conventions of *prahasana*; another has taken shape through the modern Maithili-language stage, acting, social criticism, and the collective labour of theatre practitioners. Dr Arvind Akku's publication of 2020 is an important document of this second life. It is neither a strictly literal translation nor an entirely independent story: it is a performance text founded upon the original plot and fashioned for spectators belonging to a different historical moment.

The central question of the farce is this: how do those who claim authority and moral rectitude actually conduct themselves? The guru instructs his disciple but is himself beset by desire; the judge adopts an air of impartiality yet seeks a ruling favourable to his own interests; those wearing the outward signs of religion are governed by greed, envy, deception, and self-interest. On stage, these contradictions generate laughter, but within that laughter one may discern the structural inequalities of society.

The principal argument of the present study is that the modern performance text achieves more than a mere repetition of an old comedy: it shifts the very centre of the comic. To the original plot's humour of fraud and self-seeking, the modern adaptation adds a woman's resistance, public justice, social corruption, and the moral intervention of the community. Laughter becomes, by turns, satire, impersonation, and protest. Yet this enlargement also entails the risk that narrative concentration will slacken in certain episodes and that dramatic utterance will become didactic pronouncement.

1. Sources, Method, and the Limits of Evidence

This review distinguishes three orders of evidence. First is the 2020 first edition of *Dhūrtasamāgama*, examined scene by scene for its publication particulars, preface, the playwright's note "Concerning This Play," dramatis personae, all eight scenes, songs, dialogue, stage directions, record of performances, and names of performers. Second are studies and books on Jyotirīśvara and *Dhūrtasamāgama*, identified in the concluding bibliography. Third are the general analytical categories of theatre studies—farce, irony, spoken and bodily acting, scenic design, transitions through song, public spectatorship, and dramatic distance—through which the probable workings of the performance text are considered.

An important limitation is that, although the performance text supplies stage directions and a list of productions, this research has not had access to films of every production between 1986 and 2020, full archives of directors' notes, audience interviews, or a comprehensive collection of contemporary newspaper reviews. Statements asserting without evidence that "this certainly happened on stage" have therefore been avoided. A distinction is maintained between what the book describes and what may be proposed as a possible theatrical practice.

Equally important is the inability to collate, line by line, the original Sanskrit-Prakrit-Maithili work against a critical edition. Existing scholarship permits discussion of the broad narrative sequence and linguistic character of the original farce; it does not permit a decisive identification of every line in the 2020 version as verbatim translation, adaptation, or new composition. That determination requires a separate study of textual variants. The preface itself states that, while preserving the narrative substance, the adapter adopted an independent manner and altered incidents and the disposition of characters. That declaration is the starting point of the present criticism.

2. Bibliographical Identity: Title, Publication, and Authorship

The book identifies itself explicitly as *Dhūrtasamāgama (A Maithili Play)*, with Jyotirīśvara Ṭhākura named as the author of the original and Dr Arvind Akku as the author of the performance text. Its publication particulars give the first edition as 2020, the price as 150 taka, the publisher as Navārambha, and the ISBN as 978-81-944116-3-5. Such particulars are essential to its textual history: 2020 is not the year in which the medieval work was composed, but the year in which this performance text appeared in print.

The book opens with Śaśinātha Jhā's preface, followed by Arvind Akku's "Concerning This Play," a list of characters, and eight scenes. At the end appear details of ten productions and a roster recording several performers for individual roles. This assemblage makes the book more than a play intended solely for reading: it constitutes an incipient theatrical archive. Its effort to apportion credit among the original author, adapter, directors, singers, performers, and institutions deserves recognition.

In the present discussion, the word "author" accordingly has several referents. Jyotirīśvara composed the original farce; Arvind Akku prepared the modern Maithili performance text; and directors of productions at different times included Kauśala Kumāra Dāsa, Sañjīva Miśra, and Ravindra Bihari Raju. To conflate these three layers of creative responsibility would distort theatrical history.

3. Jyotirīśvara's Literary World: Historical Circumstances and Contested Evidence

Jyotirīśvara Ṭhākura is associated particularly with *Varṇaratnākara*, an early work of Maithili prose, and *Dhūrtasamāgama*. Recent scholarship situates his

play in fourteenth-century Mithilā and associates it with the patronage of Harisiṃhadeva. In an abstract published in the Ministry of Culture's *Gyan Bharatam* conference volume in 2025, Ripuñjaya Kumāra Ṭhākura writes that the manuscript tradition of the farce survives in Mithilākṣara, Newari, and Nāgarī scripts, and that Jayakānta Miśra's 1960 edition made use of manuscript materials obtained from Nepal. This does not mean that the present performance text critically reproduces all those manuscripts; it means that the work's original text is the product of a long and multilayered transmission.

Disagreement over dating must be acknowledged. A. B. Keith's *The Sanskrit Drama* offers a later chronology for Jyotirīśvara and expresses doubt about an earlier dating based on Nepalese manuscripts. More recent manuscript scholarship and prevailing reconstructions of Maithili literary history generally give precedence to the fourteenth-century setting of Harisiṃhadeva. The historical disagreement is itself a subject for research; concealing it and proclaiming one date to be "final proof" would be unjustified.

Reading the descriptions of social groups in *Varṇaratnākara* alongside the satirical portraits of disguised figures in *Dhūrtasamāgama* raises a significant question: to what extent does the poet's subtle observation of the names and practices of diverse social actors draw upon the same linguistic and cultural resources? This connection is advanced as a comparative possibility, not as a demonstrated instance of direct textual borrowing.

4. "The First Maithili Play": Meaning and Limits of the Claim

There is substantial scholarly justification for calling *Dhūrtasamāgama* an early surviving witness to Maithili dramatic literature. To call it "the first play written entirely in Maithili," however, demands linguistic caution. According to Somdatta Hati's 2017 study, Sanskrit and Prakrit occupy important places in the original farce, in which Maithili songs also occur; Hati characterises it as a two-act *prahasana*. The 2025 abstract concerning its manuscripts likewise confirms its multilingual character.

The adjective "first," then, enfolds three different questions: is it the earliest surviving dramatic text, the earliest surviving farce incorporating Maithili songs, or the earliest play whose dialogue is entirely in Maithili? The answers need not coincide. The significance of *Dhūrtasamāgama* lies in its trilingual dramatic composition, its Maithili songs, and its historical testimony to a long performance tradition. The predominantly Maithili dialogue of the modern 2020 adaptation must not be retroactively imposed upon the linguistic identity of its medieval source.

This linguistic transition is itself an event of consequence in theatre history. An audience is not confined within a single treasury of literary language. The authoritative register of Sanskrit, the character conventions associated with Prakrit, and songs in the vernacular meet in a clash that gives social distinctions an audible form. The modern performance text negotiates these differences

otherwise: dialogue proceeds largely in Maithili, within which Sanskrit-derived terms, popular idioms, philosophical vocabulary, and contemporary satire speak together.

5. The Farce and Its Renewed Significance

Within the dramatic tradition, *prahasana* is a comic form, yet its laughter is not merely a device for amusement; it is also a technique for exposing inconsistencies of character. The lustfulness of the preacher, the fool who displays his learning, the prejudiced dispenser of justice, and the scholar who sells his principles out of greed are familiar social types in farce. The comic energy of this book proceeds along three axes: the opposition between appearance and conduct; the gulf between moral precept and self-interested action; and the distance between private quarrel and the public language of justice.

Comedy is generated on several levels. Satirical names—Mūlanāśaka, Asajjāti, and Vidūṣaka—constitute one. The enactment by which a corrupt guru tries to establish himself as "virtuous," contrary to his actual conduct, constitutes a second. Exaggerated praise or simulated piety in song supplies a third. Verbal circumlocution, the theatrical flourish of scriptural citation, bodily exaggeration, and sudden disclosure form a fourth.

The play becomes particularly distinctive where the comic action imitates the machinery of justice. A dispute enters a judicial forum, but the judge himself attempts to benefit from the object of litigation. "Religion" is no longer evidence of legitimate authority; it has become a covering under which power may be seized. The farce does not laugh only at individual rogues: it offers a grammar of institutional roguery.

6. From 1985 to 2020: The Social Making of a Performance Text

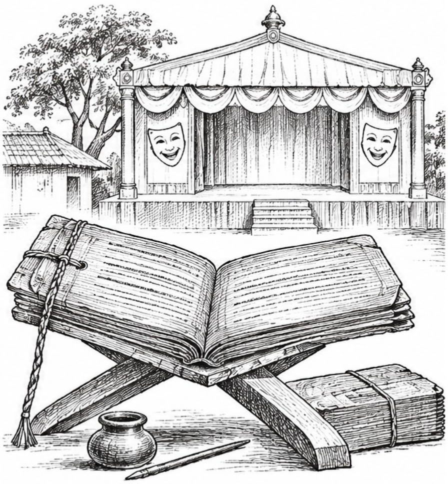
Arvind Akku's "Concerning This Play" recounts how, in 1985, the Patna-based Maithili theatre group Aripan decided to stage Jyotirīśvara's *Dhūrtasamāgama*, how work on the script began, and how the endeavour occupied approximately three months. This autobiographical account is primary evidence for the play's modern history. The writer prepares the text in collaboration with theatre practitioners; with the help and advice of several people, the writing becomes performable. Here composition is not merely a solitary creative act: it involves rehearsal, collective purpose, and cooperation within a theatrical community.

The record of productions, extending from early performances in 1986, 1987, 1988, and 1992 through later ones in 2007, 2015, 2016, 2019, and 2020, establishes that the performance text did not exist as a one-night event. Its geographical reach extends from Patna to Delhi and locations around Madhubani. The book supplies no independent critical evidence as to the success or failure of any individual production; it does, however, document repeated performances in its concluding record.

The process of placing an "old play" on the "modern stage" commonly introduces three tendencies: condensation of the narrative, predominance of a language immediately intelligible to listeners, and a new moral conclusion for contemporary audiences. All three are evident in the performance text. Nevertheless, creative freedom must be distinguished from historical fidelity. The adapter preserves the basis of the plot, but the present version cannot be regarded as an unbroken replica of the original.

From the criticism of this extended theatrical journey, it is necessary to turn to the play's internal movement. The list of productions describes its public life; the eight-scene arrangement shows how that life assumes narrative form on stage.

7. Dramatic Architecture: Eight Scenes, the Chorus, and Presence



Manuscript, theatrical space, and the transmission of a farce

The performance text extends over eight scenes. This is not a mechanical reproduction of the traditional division into acts but a fresh dramaturgical plan that continually reorients the attention of actors and spectators. The first scene offers a conversation between the Sūtradhāra and Naṭī, references to theatrical history, and the germ of the guru-disciple episode. The second introduces the Kotwāl and incidents involving the guru. The third stages Anaṅgasenā's dramatic arrival. The fourth brings in Mṛtaṅgara Ṭhākura, the guru and disciple's solicitation of alms, and Suratapriyā. The fifth elaborates the dispute over the dream-beauty and the rivalry concerning Anaṅgasenā. The sixth takes place in a court-like forum presided over by Asajjāti Miśra. The seventh involves claims of possession over Anaṅgasenā, Mūlanāśaka's intervention, and the disruption of justice. In the eighth, Anaṅgasenā addresses the assembled public in resistance, and the play ends with a song.

Several scenes begin with directions such as "light comes up on the stage" or "entry with the lighting." These devices establish divisions and indicate changes

of place, but if a director relies exclusively upon alternations of darkness and illumination, the rhythm may become discontinuous. Brief musical bridges, a common scenic arrangement, and transitions organised through actors' movement could make the changes more fluid.

The chorus is not an incidental appendage: it is a narrative thread. It announces developments in the plot, confers a comic dignity upon characters, supplies moral commentary, and brings the concluding collective emotion into alignment. Its presence links the stage, both visually and aurally, with popular memory. Choices concerning lighting, drums, movement in dance, and the shaping of scene changes offer the director wide interpretative possibilities.

The structure has a progressive movement: first the play introduces itself; then the hypocrisy of the guru and disciple is disclosed; Anaṅgasenā's arrival intensifies the dispute over possession; the court transforms that dispute into a crisis of power; and resistance finally acquires a public voice. The ensuing examination of the scenes tests this progression.

8. Scene One: Metatheatre and the Stage's Own History

The opening dialogue between the Sūtradhāra and Naṭī brings theatre itself inside the theatrical action. Naṭī questions the identities of actors and plays, their antiquity, and the audience's interests; the Sūtradhāra introduces the medieval farce. This prologue equips new spectators with a background but simultaneously risks arresting dramatic momentum through exposition. Its distinctive feature is that the characters discuss the existence of the play before its story begins: theatre becomes the narrator of its own history.

Naṭī's interrogation of her theatrical existence turns into a form of self-doubt within the world of the stage. The Sūtradhāra's response invokes the hope of performance, the audience's memory, and the claim to be presenting the "first play." The work seeks not merely to tell a story but also to secure public acknowledgement for Maithili theatre's historical existence.

Before reaching the brisk pace expected of farce, the first scene prolongs a prose exposition. Its defence is that a local audience may need an introduction to cultural history; the objection is that an excess of transmitted information can turn "the present tense of the stage" into "the time of the lecture." In a contemporary production, this portion could be compressed through humorous exchanges, a brief enactment, and song employing several voices.

After this self-introduction, the play leaves its explanatory register and arranges its first direct encounter with embodied authority. With the Kotwāl's entrance, historical narration gives way to the comedy of action and fear.

9. Scene Two: The Kotwāl, the Staff, and the Violence of Authority

The second scene begins with the Kotwāl's song: "At the mere sound of the Kotwāl's roar / the poor holy man went out of his mind." Through its images of

the staff, the face, guard duty, and beating, authority acquires bodily form. The Kotwāl is not simply a representative of administration: his weapon and voice immediately identify for the spectator the hands in which power resides.

The guru and disciple are frightened at the sight of him; the insecurity beneath their religious imposture is exposed the moment it confronts public power. The Kotwāl speaks the language of his "civic" responsibilities, but his self-display and the theatrical production of fear call his impartiality into question. The scene depicts the double character of authority—protector and terror—through humour.

The exchange with the Kotwāl can be sharpened with relatively few words. In performance, the timing of each blow of his staff against the ground, the characters' startled responses, and a glance directed at the spectators can create comedy. Conversely, if the simulation of violence approaches realistic brutality, the rhythm of farce may break down. Controlled exaggeration is therefore appropriate here.

The Kotwāl episode exposes the emptiness of the guru and disciple's courage; in the following scene, Anaṅgasenā's arrival reveals the desire beneath their moral pretensions. Fear of external authority and the conflict of inward desire thereby complement one another.

10. Scene Three: Anaṅgasenā as the Decisive Centre, Not an Object

The third scene opens at midnight with lighting, music, and Anaṅgasenā's dancing entrance. In the initial masculine gaze, she is a beauty, a restless-faced woman, and the centre of attraction. The chorus's address also reinforces that aestheticising gaze. Yet Anaṅgasenā herself turns the question back upon the ascetics: why are men who deliver such grand sermons unable to control their own minds?

The crucial question is who is granted the authority of the gaze when a woman enters the stage. If her body is presented merely as a source of laughter or an object of desire, the possibilities of critical drama diminish. If her gaze, silences, replies, and control of stage space are strong, however, she becomes an agent who challenges the narrative imposed upon her. Her speech in the latter part of the play brings that possibility into view.

At the close of the third scene, the guru and disciple's competing claims—each insisting upon "his own"—cease to be the language of love and become the language of ownership. This moral irony lies at the centre of the play. Before Anaṅgasenā can articulate "her own desire," she has been made the "subject matter" of their dispute; later scenes prepare a rejoinder to that violent transformation. Whatever depth the play possesses as a critique of gender lies within this unequal beginning.

After their rival claims, the dramatic gaze turns once more to ordinary society. Episodes of alms and domestic life test the ways in which social conduct sustains personal hypocrisy.

11. Scene Four: Alms, the Young Man, Mṛtaṅgara Ṭhākura, and Suratapriyā

The fourth scene changes location to a street in a residential district of Dhūrtanagarī and a brick house. The guru and disciple's performance of alms-seeking at first appears to be a moral appeal for charity, but its concealed purpose is entangled with food, shelter, advantage, and desire. The young man's arrival adds a measure of the rough texture of social reality: when religious disguise confronts ordinary labouring people or everyday life, the prestige of sermonising begins to crumble.

Mṛtaṅgara Ṭhākura emerges as a social actor who, lacking discrimination, trades upon spiritual prestige. In his conversation with the guru and disciple, claims to charity, honour, religious authority, and propriety are intermingled. His appearance reveals the confused morality of a householder. He is not merely another rogue; his presence testifies to a society willing to accommodate roguery.

Suratapriyā's entrance echoes this structure from the standpoint of a second female character. The contradiction between religious ostentation, the guru's words, and embodied lust becomes clearer. Suratapriyā meets the domineering gestures of the male characters with counter-questions. This scene provides a concrete illustration of the comic possibilities of the distance between "performed virtue" and "actual desire."

Following these social encounters, the fourth scene returns the story to its central conflict. The guru and disciple's superficial spiritual discourse now breaks more openly into claims of possession over a woman.

12. Scene Five: The Dream-Beauty and the Rivalry of Desire

The fifth scene renews the guru and disciple's quarrel over the dream-beauty. Philosophical statements about body and soul become, in practice, a screen for desire. The language that calls a woman "mine" constitutes a subtle violence within the dialogue. The guru uses his elevated spiritual position to deny the disciple equality; the disciple, in defending his own desire, violates the sanctity of the guru's position.

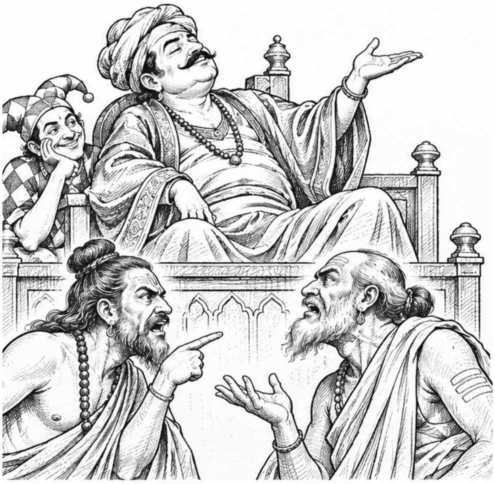
After Anaṅgasenā's entrance, the discourse of dreams turns into an immediate politics of the body. Both guru and disciple look towards the same woman, yet each seeks to prove the other a hypocrite. The scene produces ironic laughter: the audience knows that both share the same failing even as each proclaims his innocence.

Anaṅgasenā's responses are the most important element of this episode. If the director presents her reaction through a sustained pause and an independent

position on stage, spectators can apprehend the indecency of the men's possessive language. Without such restraint the scene may degenerate into the woman's continuous objectification.

This personal rivalry cannot remain merely a dispute between two men: claims of rank, authority, and impartiality arise in order to resolve it. The entrance of the court in the next scene is consequently an organic turn in the plot.

13. Scene Six: The Court of Asajjāti Miśra and the Dramatic Irony of Justice



The farcical court and the collapse of judicial impartiality

The sixth scene opens in Asajjāti Miśra's court. The raised seat, the Vidūṣaka beside it, and the entrance song make the stage a formal imitation of the judicial apparatus. Yet the moment the judge reveals the priority he attaches to food, the solemnity of the court is overturned by laughter. Hypocrisy resides here in the interval between the asserted "sanctity of justice" and the appetite for "personal gain."

A telling couplet in the entrance song declares, "They chase truthful speech away / and abuse the upright." Its irony is that the presiding dispenser of justice proves to be the very person who drives truth out. The court song is not praise but inverted panegyric. The Vidūṣaka's position is important to the scenic structure: he may expose the judge's mask, but when he becomes implicated in self-interest, his capacity to supply a moral alternative is diminished.

Asajjāti Miśra assumes the posture of "conducting a hearing" in place of exercising judgement. Listening to parties, invoking argument, and pronouncing rules become empty procedures when the adjudicator is himself an interested party. The play depicts not the "absence of law," but the presence of injustice in the guise of justice. Contemporary spectators may hear echoes of

corrupt judicial, governmental, or *panchayat* institutions, although the text does not directly substantiate a specific accusation against any particular contemporary body.

Once the judge's impartiality is compromised, the dispute is not resolved; instead, the woman's dissent and economic self-interest converge on the same stage. From here, the seventh scene displays the consequences of the conflict.

14. Scene Seven: Claim, Debt, Violence, and Anaṅgasenā's Refusal

The seventh scene carries the confrontation towards its climax. In the exchange between the Vidūṣaka and Anaṅgasenā, a woman's consent, the suggestion of bodily exchange, and the masculine language of "purpose" collide. Anaṅgasenā declares: "Under no circumstances shall I accept Asajjāti Miśra." This short sentence shifts the centre of the entire dispute. The question is no longer "Who will obtain the woman?" but "Can the woman decide for herself?"

Mūlanāśaka's claim concerning a debt opens a new route for greed in the play. Money, bodies, confinement, and punishment become entangled. The judge who seeks to appropriate another's rights soon finds himself humiliated and imperilled. Mūlanāśaka's comic intervention becomes a political statement: when institutional power is submerged in private advantage, its dignity proves extraordinarily fragile.

The dramaturgical challenge of the scene is that Anaṅgasenā's position, Asajjāti's interests, Mūlanāśaka's arrival, and the reactions of the guru and disciple become compressed into a single confrontation. Successful acting requires clarity of spatial relationships, bodily movement, and rapid response. If every character shouts in the same register, both meaning and satire may be lost.

The eighth scene attempts to give the open injustice of the seventh a public answer. Anaṅgasenā's declaration of her own decision and her address to society at large decisively indicate the play's changing centre.

15. Scene Eight: The Speech of Resistance and Public Justice

Anaṅgasenā as the centre of public speech

In the final scene, Anaṅgasenā occupies the principal centre of the stage. All the other characters stand behind her, and the light falls upon her. The stage direction itself becomes a visible reversal of power: the woman who first appeared as an object of desire is now a public speaker, while the men who surrounded her have receded into the background.

In her address, the corruption of ascetics, ministers, and judges enters a single moral frame. She declares that she was free before and will remain free now. The utterance is the modern adaptation's most forceful political moment. Nevertheless, "women's emancipation" cannot be demonstrated solely on the basis of the last speech. Criticism must also reckon with the extent to which the male gaze dominates the first seven scenes and the time allotted to the woman's autonomous speech. Does the ethical novelty of the final scene erase the earlier inequality, or make that inequality newly questionable? Both readings remain open.

The concluding song contains lines such as "May all good people prosper: this alone is our wish" and "May bonds of love and the language of affection unite everyone." The farce's bitter satire is transformed at its conclusion into a conciliatory aspiration for society. This may be called the play's philosophical paradox: a comedy whose laughter seeks the truth ends with an ethical song of well-being. The question is whether that gentleness leaves spectators capable of alert resistance or offers them temporary consolation. The answer will depend upon the director's choices.

Read in sequence, the eight scenes make it difficult to regard the songs as intermittent entertainment. Song introduces characters, establishes social distance, and at the close gives the conflict a collective interpretation. The

following discussion therefore considers the relation between sound and plot in its own right.

16. The Dramaturgy of Song: Narration, Sound, and Social Satire

It would be a mistake merely to count the occasions on which songs occur in this performance text. A song becomes effective when it changes the position from which a scene is viewed. In the first scene, the chorus invokes Naṭarāja and prepares the play's collective voice; the second brings a folk-inflected mockery of the Kotwāl's roar; the third describes Anaṅgasenā's beauty; the fourth offers a song soliciting alms; the sixth reverses the rhetoric of praise to expose judicial corruption; and the ending proclaims communal well-being. The songs constitute an axis of the adapted play, for they become a commenting voice above the level of ordinary realist dialogue.

The language of the chorus combines Sanskrit-derived words, Maithili verb forms, melodic conventions familiar across the Bhojpuri-Maithili region, and the alliteration of popular theatre. The arrangement of words is sometimes fluid and sometimes metrically irregular. Continuous syllabic exactitude is not the sole criterion of theatrical song; ease of singing, breath divisions, recurrence of the beat, and compatibility with the performers' articulation also matter. Future productions would gain from preserving separate indications of melody, rhythmic cycle, vocal range, and footwork.

The songs also raise the question of "satirical distance." When Asajjāti's vices are praised, spectators recognise that the song is not a sincere encomium but an exposure of counterfeit prestige. In that sense, the chorus may become the "critical companion of the audience." If, however, the songs are excessively long, loud, or devoid of changes in expression, they arrest the plot. Their proper use is one in which dramatic thought remains audible through the rhythm of song and bodily expression.

In the history of musical drama, the Maithili songs within the original multilingual composition must be remembered. Yet the equivalence of every song in the present volume to a counterpart in Jyotirīśvara's manuscripts cannot be asserted without separate textual collation. The present discussion of songs is confined to the performance text of 2020.

The wide-ranging functions of song can be tested in specific verses. It is therefore necessary to examine selected excerpts individually, attending to their meanings, the positions of characters, and their possible theatrical uses.

17. Anthology of Quotations: The Songs Examined and Their Interpretation

The verse excerpts selected here have been read directly in the printed edition of the play under consideration. The spelling and syntax of the printed original have been retained as far as possible in the source analysis. None of these lines is

quoted on the assumption that it belongs to the "old text of Jyotirīśvara": they are passages from the performance text. The descriptive names of the songs are supplied to facilitate research and are not necessarily claimed to be their authentic titles in the book.

17.1. Internal Satire of the Religious Disguise

His forehead adorned with sandalwood paste,
the rogue holy man Viśvanagara approaches;
the disciple Snātaka accompanies him.
Deeply fallen, he pursues courtesans;
desire fills every limb.
Look, brothers, who is coming ...

The holy image of "sandalwood paste" is immediately overturned by the allegation of consorting with courtesans and by the insistence upon lust. The song does not attempt an extended psychological analysis of the character; its method is rapid identification. If an actor applies sandalwood with exaggerated solemnity while the song supplies its sly indications, laughter will arise of itself.

17.2. The Kotwāl's Roar

At the mere sound of the Kotwāl's roar,
the poor holy man went mad, did he not?
Went mad, did he not? The poor holy man went mad.
Staff in hand, turban upon his head;
on guard he acknowledges neither father nor son.
A notorious wicked malefactor:
so he went mad, did he not?
At the mere sound of the Kotwāl's roar,
the poor holy man went mad.

In this song, constructed around the sound of the "roar," fear of punitive authority becomes popular humour. It does not seem to offer a direct criticism of the institution of power; rather, it reveals the sham courage of the preacher. A mounting rhythmic pace and the controlled beat of the staff could bring its dramatic point into sharper focus.

17.3. Anaṅgasenā's Entrance Song

Anaṅgasenā, queen of love,
comes along the road in her finery;
beautiful, with a lively face,
her hair arranged with a central parting.
Her anklets ring, *chhanan-chhan-chhan*;
she shoots arrows from her eyes.

Wounding all, she charms everyone,
yet comes into no one's hands.

The song combines the allure constructed by the male gaze with the image of a woman who cannot be possessed. The phrase "comes into no one's hands" may suggest Anaṅgasenā's autonomy, although most of the song remains devoted to descriptions of her beauty. Heard against the later speech of resistance, the phrase acquires a renewed resonance.

17.4. The Guru and Disciple's Hypocritical Song of Alms

Generous giver, offer alms;
confer your blessings upon the ascetic.
The storehouse shall never diminish;
give with an open heart.

The brief repetitions surround the word "giving" with an aura of counterfeit reverence. When spectators know the difference between the singers' desire and their conduct, "charity" ceases to be a request and becomes a theatrical sign of opportunism. The song may be more effective as simple repetition, communal chant, or a line answered by the audience than as a solemn, incantatory recital.

17.5. Alms and the Unequal Relationship to "Woman"

Woman who fasts through the month, give alms;
confer your blessings upon the ascetic.
The storehouse shall never diminish;
spread your good name throughout the city.

Here the repeated appeal claims that a man's "virtue" is confirmed by a woman's gift. When religious prestige conceals bodily desire and hunger for food, the song establishes two levels of meaning.

17.6. Asajjāti Miśra's Song of Justice

How well he knows the Āgamas and Vedas;
how skilfully he draws away others' wealth.
The whole city is troubled by him;
yet the entire city seeks justice from him.
He drives truthful speech away
and heaps abuse upon honest people.
His virtues are priceless in name alone:
listen to the words of Asajjāti.

The song derives its force from inverted panegyric: the expected excellence of knowing the Vedas and Āgamas is coupled with a talent for acquiring other people's property. The one who ought to protect truth expels it. Through these reversals, the artificiality of judicial authority is apparent from the judge's first

entrance. If the director stages the song in the manner of an official royal welcome, its satire may become still sharper.

17.7. Public Welfare in the Epilogue

> May all good people prosper: this alone is our wish.
> May no nation become a nation of rogues: such is still our hope.
> May bonds of love and the language of affection unite everyone.
> May deceit and force never govern a state: this alone is our wish.

In the concluding stanza, "roguery" rises beyond private wrongdoing to become a question of public government. The object of ridicule expands to political ethics. If the song's simplified optimism is connected concretely on stage to the preceding scene of satire, the ending will be effective; without that connection, it may sound like a conventional moral sermon.

As against the collective voice of song, dialogue brings the characters into direct confrontation with one another. Within such collisions, words, pauses, and distances on stage become dramatic meaning. A separate examination of dialogue is therefore necessary after the discussion of the songs.

18. Analysis of Dialogue: Utterance, Character Position, and Implication

Apart from the songs, the performance text derives its strength from the devious bodily language of its dialogues. The first scene is at times burdened with information about literary history, but once the conflict begins, self-interest discovers its appropriate idiom. The orality of these exchanges consists not simply of logically sequenced sentences, but of stammering, pauses, feigned humility, sudden insults, and turns of laughter.

Anaṅgasenā's "Under no circumstances shall I accept Asajjāti Miśra" is a decisive intervention of the utmost verbal economy. The Sanskrit-derived "under no circumstances" (*kathamapi*) gives the statement a legal finality, but the sentence as a whole is a Maithili woman's proclamation of self-determination. Spoken seriously and distinctly, without comic inflection, it would shift the scene abruptly from the humour of bodies to the rights of persons.

Before opening the judicial proceeding, Asajjāti declares that "the matter is serious," but subsequent sentences disclose his self-serving intentions. Formal language does not make a decision just; the distance between the principle and the practice of justice turns it into a grotesque imitation. The judge's elevated seat may signify arrogance in performance, yet his descent from it can disclose the weakness of the human being beneath the office.

In the verbal battle between guru and disciple, the repetition of "mine" and "yours" fills the foundation of their relationship with the violence of possession. Devotion, instruction, discipleship, initiation, and renunciation lose their disinterested spiritual meanings and become excuses for rivalry. Close physical

proximity between the actors, imitation of one another's religious costume, and the simultaneous turning of their gaze towards Anaṅgasenā would give visible form to this linguistic contradiction.

Mūlanāśaka's entry brings words such as "debt," "punishment," "bondage," and "the guru's fee." At this point religion and justice become entangled in the web of economic exchange. Comedy grows richer because spectators can discern beneath the loud laughter a definite critique of the social order.

To comprehend these conflicts of language, we must now consider how individual characters shape their speech through social position and private desire. Analysis of character does not separate itself from dialogue; it clarifies the narrative causes of the dialogue's meanings.

19. Character Study: Viśvanagara—Profane Desire in a Sacred Guise

The name Viśvanagara suggests expansiveness and knowledge, while the actor's conduct reveals the opposite character. He uses his spiritual superiority to assert authority over the disciple, contrives to see the woman before the disciple can, and becomes embroiled in a scene of greed. If he is turned into a mere buffoon, the humour will be transient; if an actor can impart a subtle sense of self-deception to him, the social criticism will deepen.

Viśvanagara's pretension has three layers: the religious signs of his costume, his assumption of knowledge through speech, and his will to possess a woman. Clothing does not establish sanctity; instead, it demonstrates how readily society is impressed by external signs. The same mouth speaks of "devotion" and "lust," and spectators recognise the character's hypocrisy through the contradiction.

The laughter produced by Viśvanagara in performance should be directed not simply at his person but at the incoherence of his claims. It is necessary to recognise the human weakness of someone who has gone astray, yet to excuse him as merely "entertaining" would impede the play's critical purpose. The actor needs three different bodily registers: a proud entrance, a sudden alteration of gait on seeing the woman, and artificial humility before the judge.

20. Character Study: Snātaka—An Equal Rival Beneath the Disciple's Disguise

The name Snātaka evokes education, training, and refinement, yet the disciple is no less eager than the guru to violate the discipline of discipleship. He imitates the pretension through which the guru clothes himself in the language of principle. Thus, although the disciple appears to oppose his master morally, he is in fact an extension of the master's character. The underlying satirical implication is that corrupt institutions produce corrupt followers.

The comic duel between guru and disciple calls for symmetry: one issues an admonition and the other challenges him in his own words; one treats the woman as a possession and the other advances the same claim. The acting

becomes distinctive when both simultaneously assume the same "holy" posture and expose one another.

The dramatic language mingles middle-class sermonising, popular sayings, and Sanskrit-derived terms of conduct. If the actor playing Snātaka can shift rapidly among these layers, the comedy will gain attraction. The portrayal must remain subtle enough to prevent spectators from assuming that the disciple is innocent merely because the guru is culpable; the disciple himself participates in the system of fraudulence.

21. Character Study: Anaṅgasenā and Suratapriyā—Differences in the Female Gaze

Anaṅgasenā and Suratapriyā are both introduced through a masculine gaze, but their dramatic functions are not identical. Anaṅgasenā's trajectory culminates in collective public resistance. Suratapriyā directly tests the pretensions of the guru and disciple. This differentiation enables varied dramatic rhythms: the first involves a dispute over possession; the second, a practical exposure of hypocrisy.

To turn these characters into mere objects of ornament through costume or choreography would be an aesthetically and ethically impoverished choice. They should not be passive masks that listen, but characters endowed with an active gaze and a power of reply. Suratapriyā's speeches in particular contain a voice capable of interrogating the preacher; her pauses and the concealed sharpness of her mockery can create fresh meanings.

Anaṅgasenā's "liberation" consequently depends to a considerable extent upon scenic composition. Four moments may be read as phases of a continuous transformation: the dancing entrance in the third scene, the men's rivalry in the fifth, her explicit refusal in the seventh, and her address to the spectators in the eighth. The voice of the woman gradually emerges on stage within an unequal world. The justification of that centrality will, however, be stronger only if the director makes her pain, anger, humour, and choices seriously perceptible in the earlier scenes.

22. Character Study: Asajjāti Miśra, the Vidūṣaka, and Mūlanāśaka

Asajjāti Miśra embodies the formal authority of justice. His entrance, elevated seat, accompanying Vidūṣaka, and official song imitate the judicial system. The imitation becomes comic, however, when he pays more attention to fees, food, personal advantage, and Anaṅgasenā than to justice. The name "Asajjāti" itself functions as a characterising sign, but its caste-related satire requires careful critical handling in a modern production.

In the Indian theatrical tradition, the Vidūṣaka is often an agile speaker of truth; in this adaptation, however, he himself participates in opportunism. He should not be understood simply as an "innocent commentator upon justice." He stands between spectators and authority, and his speech may move towards either social

resistance or private gain. The rhythm of his dialogue shifts between comic questioning, naked self-interest, and profiteering.

Mūlanāśaka's very name is ironic. Entering the court, he unsettles its distribution of power through a financial claim. He is no ideal citizen-hero; his own conduct is similarly marked by self-interest. It is therefore more accurate to say not that "justice has arrived" but that "one act of roguery cancels another." The play's final tragicomic implication lies here: conflict among rogues does not in itself secure justice for ordinary people.

23. Supporting Characters: Naṭī, Sūtradhāra, Kotwāl, the Young Man, and Mṛtaṅgara Ṭhākura

The Sūtradhāra and Naṭī form the threshold between theatrical tradition and the contemporary audience. Their involvement introduces the self-reflexive voice of modern Maithili theatrical consciousness. The Kotwāl appears as the mask of administrative intimidation, the young man as an interruption from ordinary life, and Mṛtaṅgara Ṭhākura as an embodiment of the desire for social standing. The task of each minor character is not to become an isolated island outside the main story, but to strip the masks from the principal figures.

Mṛtaṅgara Ṭhākura particularly deserves attention. If he is represented only as a comically wealthy man, his underlying social relationships will be lost. A figure who purchases the prestige of the guru and disciple or consents to their sermons establishes a relationship between the splendour of the costume and social validation. "Roguery" is not merely personal deceit; it is also an arrangement supported by those who patronise and consume deceit.

The young man increases the "diversity of voices" in the story, although the textual basis for his character is limited. In a shortened contemporary performance, his dialogue may be reworked, but before deleting the role the director should understand how it supplies a social ground for the central conflict.

The separate functions of these characters together yield a common effect: spectators sometimes laugh, sometimes feel discomfited, and sometimes recognise the injustice of the characters. The aesthetics of this changing experience reside in the relations among comedy, satire, and compassion.

24. The Interrelationship of Humour, Irony, Satire, and Compassion

Not all forms of laughter are alike. A character takes his own appearance seriously while the spectator perceives its falsity: that is dramatic irony. Characters repeat themselves and make words perform tricks: that is verbal humour. They recoil from the staff, seem about to fall, or run away: that is physical comedy. They invoke religion to conceal lust, justice to legitimise

plunder, knowledge to mask foolishness, and virtue to enable deception: that is social satire.

The play's farcical power becomes more apparent once these distinctions are made. It is insufficient merely to say that "rogues make us laugh." The double meanings of Asajjāti Miśra's entrance song, for example, produce humour; when Anaṅgasenā refuses him, the rhythm of laughter suddenly stops, allowing for compassion or anger. The song of the Kotwāl's roar depends upon swift bodily reactions, whereas the epilogue appeals to the feeling of collective well-being.

If actors, musicians, and lighting designers reduce all these rhythms to the same kind of "comedy," the underlying gravity will be diminished. To shape rhythm properly is to allow the audience to laugh at the appropriate moment and, at another, to fall silent before the discomfort of injustice. To abolish that discomfort would be to deprive the play of its dramatic force.

25. Language, Style, and Contemporary Maithili Registers

The adaptation's dialogue moves among colloquial Maithili, Sanskrit-derived nouns, certain Hindi-adjacent terms, and proverbial expressions. Judicial words such as "legal procedure," "charge," and "defendant" establish the formality of the sixth scene, whereas "Guruji," "Baba," "rogue," "staff," and "communal feast" carry aural signs of popular life. Such movements between linguistic levels allow social ostentation and changing emotional registers to be heard distinctly.

Some sentences are long and difficult to manage in a single theatrical breath, particularly in the prologue and final address. A line that a reader can absorb readily in prose cannot necessarily be spoken by an actor with equivalent rhythm, weight, and intonation of anger. Editing for spoken performance therefore requires not arbitrary excision but division into meaningful units, reorganisation of punctuation, and clear indications of replies.

The question of "purity" in Maithili is equally delicate. The language of a play is not a grammar examination; it is the spoken world of different characters, where distinctions appropriate to them should form part of aesthetic experience. Nevertheless, printing errors, inconsistent spelling of the same words, uncertain musical pauses, and incomplete indications of dialogue can obstruct scholarly reading. A future reprint that verifies readings while attending to the gestures of songs, pauses, and textual variants would make the play more useful.

26. Indigenous Humour and Its Relation to Popular Theatre

The spectators' experience is intensely active in the popular forms of *prahasana*. Spectators do not wish to see merely a recitation of "refined Sanskrit" on the stage; they wish to recognise the pretence, corruption, and gestures of authority surrounding them. Through popular vocabulary, moving rather than static figures, choral songs, and comic impersonation, the modern performance text of *Dhūrtasamāgama* responds to this expectation.

From this standpoint, it matters that a production originating in Patna's theatrical world reached Delhi and various venues in Mithilā. Audiences in urban auditoriums, theatrical festivals run by institutions, and the cultural premises of schools are not identical. Satire that is immediately recognised in Patna may require contextualisation elsewhere. The play's language of daily life, and its manner of bringing subjects gradually into view, can be means of reaching these different audiences.

The "popular" does not simply denote folk melodies or rural life. It also means the shared experience of public life, the institutional memory of a theatrical community, and a collective capacity to receive humour. Popular songs and intellectual satire coexist in this farce. Yet the book supplies no empirical field evidence of how rural audiences actually responded; the discussion of reception here therefore rests upon possibilities, not measured outcomes.

27. The Critique of Religion in the Play: Faith and Hypocrisy

It would be premature to identify the work as "anti-religious" or as "propaganda for one religion" merely because it condemns characters wearing religious dress. Scholarly discussions of the original farce refer to satirical treatment of different religious communities. The principal object of the present performance text, however, is the fraudulent appropriation of bodies, wealth, and power through religious signs. Hypocrisy and faith are distinct concepts. The play laughs at the moment when outward costume is made into false proof of morality.

An article by Bijayendra Jha and Nishu Kumari, published in 2026, reads the original *Dhūrtasamāgama* in a context of particular religious-sectarian contention. That approach may be regarded as one scholarly interpretation; without rigorous comparison of the entire original text and historical sources, however, "anti-Buddhist polemic" cannot justifiably be elevated into the play's undisputed and exclusive purpose. Criticism of Brahmanical authority, ascetic disguise, and judicial self-interest is also present in the farce.

The social significance of the modern version becomes more complex where the faults of guru and disciple are carried into criticism of the judge and courtiers. This is not a story of the destruction of religion, but an art of bringing impure conduct pursued in morality's name before the tribunal of public scrutiny.

28. Justice in the Play: Procedure, Prejudice, and Conflict of Interest

The play's judicial chamber is a "farcical laboratory of justice." In the judge's entrance, title, seat, song, and the presence of the Vidūṣaka signify legitimacy; in the actual proceedings, the judge makes himself a party to the dispute and converts his office into an instrument of private advantage. The modern significance of this dramatic construction is plain: the outward form of justice offers no guarantee of its proper exercise.

The fundamental principles of justice—the decision-maker's impartiality, the right of the parties to be heard, the avoidance of conflicts of interest, and the consent of those concerned—are each subjected to questioning within the farce. Asajjāti's imitation of judicial language is a species of verbal mask. Although the Vidūṣaka occupies a place near the judge, he is no impartial guardian of morality; his own dealings in gain reinforce the feudal-courtly image.

The disregard of Anaṅgasenā's consent is a failure both of law and of ethics. The judicial question here is not solely "Whose right is it?" but "Whose voice has been heard?" The final scene attempts to answer this question, but the work offers no practical programme for institutional reform. Its task is to make moral judgement a dramatic problem.

29. Gender, the Gaze, and Female Autonomy: An Indispensable Critical Condition

The most difficult issue this play poses for contemporary spectators is its representation of women. Anaṅgasenā's entrance song praises her outward beauty; several men lay claim to her; and at the end she herself raises the question of freedom. One reader may call this a progressive narrative of liberation; another may ask why most of the woman's scenes are structured through male desire. Both questions are legitimate.

The theatrical response cannot be reduced either to "remove the song" or to "reproduce the old text exactly." It is possible to establish the heroine's authority over her gaze: whom she looks at, whom she ignores, whose speech she interrupts, when she stands at the centre of the stage, and from whom she maintains her distance. These bodily choices can transform the play's meaning even though they fall outside its verbal language.

In the sixth and seventh scenes especially, the judge's language of "acquisition" and the Vidūṣaka's language of "purpose" should register not merely as comic speech but as evidence of a misogynistic outlook. If all the men form a ring around Anaṅgasenā and she remains a silent image at its centre, the violence of possession becomes visible; if she breaks through that ring to face the spectators, the resistance of the final scene can become a dramatic journey rather than an appended sermon.

30. Names of Class, Caste, and Occupation: The Need for Careful Reading

Through such names and designations as "Asajjāti Miśra," "Mūlanāśaka," "Kotwāl," "young man," and "mendicant," the play establishes categories of social class, authority, caste association, and occupation. Exaggeration in names was a recognised comic technique within the conventions of medieval farce; those names may bear different meanings for a contemporary audience. Criticism must distinguish mockery from the reproduction of social stigma.

Laughter at the name "Asajjāti" should not make caste-based insult appear natural. A character's moral corruption is established by conduct, not by the innate qualities of a social group. Similarly, the critique of a mendicant's hypocrisy differs from a general ridicule of poverty or begging. A director who keeps these distinctions clear will give the political edge of the farce a more inclusive character.

Mūlanāśaka enters like an intermediary in financial transactions. To turn him into a universal symbol of a caste or profession would diminish the play's social complexity. Treating the name as a device of moral irony is a more defensible theatrical option.

These subtleties of character names and social signs acquire concrete form on stage. Costume, lighting, entrance paths, and collective bodily arrangements determine which things spectators will laugh at and which injustices they will question.

31. Scenic Composition: Stage, Lighting, Costume, and Bodily Signs

The text indicates places such as a city street, a residential neighbourhood, Asajjāti's court, and a public space for the conclusion. There is no need to construct large realistic buildings to represent them. A flexible stage—with a raised seat at the centre, entrances for characters at one side, the chorus at another, and movable symbolic objects such as a staff, bag, or chair—could serve most scenes. This is a possible new experiment derived from the dramatic text, not an authenticated description of the original productions.

Lighting is important in differentiating the eight scenes. Yet identical repetitions of "light–haze–darkness" at every transition can diminish dramatic intensity. The light of Anaṅgasenā's first entrance could create expectation; the courtroom lighting of the sixth scene, severe formality; the seventh, rapid disorder; and the concentrated lighting of the final scene, the focus of resistance.

Sandalwood, a staff, ochre garments, or an exaggerated priestly costume can easily elicit humour, but the contradiction between signs and behaviour must be legible. There is dramatic advantage in setting the seriousness of the judge's costume against his greed, the Kotwāl's commanding equipment against ordinary mockery, and the decorative costume of the female characters against the independence of their gaze.

The "bodily arrangement of the group" is especially important in physical acting. When guru and disciple clash, almost identical postures can suggest that they suffer from "the same malady." In court, a raised Asajjāti and a lower Anaṅgasenā create inequality. At the end, Anaṅgasenā stands in the centre of the light while the men recede behind her: this visual composition changes the semantic grammar of the play.

32. Musical Composition and Sound Dramaturgy: Practical Proposals

A musical thread could be created that is capable of transformation from the opening invocation to the concluding song of public well-being. The *dholak*, *mañjīrā*, flute, harmonium, or a minimal arrangement of modern percussion could be employed. Without evidence from actual earlier productions, however, one cannot assert that particular instruments were used. The musician's primary requirements are that song lyrics remain intelligible, dialogue is not submerged, and the rhythm of transitions advances the story.

The blow of a staff at the Kotwāl's entrance, gentle repetition in the alms song, a formal proclamation in court, and a moment of silence before Anaṅgasenā's final speech produce different sound patterns. Especially in the seventh scene's multi-character confrontation, meaning may drown in a web of excessive sound. A sound design governed by clarity rather than excess is preferable.

The chorus can become more than a troupe standing outside the story; it can serve as a narrator. At times it may face the spectators with commentary, at times form a line behind the characters, and at times create dramatic distance through the irony of its songs. In this way the musical ensemble can become an active collective intelligence within the theatre.

33. Acting Method: Comic Timing, Pause, and Bodily Grammar

Exaggeration is often indispensable to farce, but unregulated exaggeration destroys the differences between characters. Viśvanagara's roguery might begin in pride, Snātaka's cunning in the gestures of argument, the Kotwāl's power in a sharp voice and staff, Asajjāti's official arrogance in slow and formal speech, and the Vidūṣaka's manoeuvring in an agile rhythm. Comic acting would then avoid monotony.

Anaṅgasenā and Suratapriyā should not be acted solely through the conventions of erotic beauty. Silent ridicule, the sharpness of reply, withdrawal of the body, a dismissive gaze, and eventually direct public address are possibilities that give the female characters dramatic seriousness in varying proportions.

A pause is exceptionally useful in short dramatic exchanges. When the judge utters the word "truth" and immediately acts from greed, a brief silence enables spectators to grasp the contradiction. If an actor rushes directly to the next line, the satirical action remains unfulfilled.

The ordering of the characters' final collective entrance is a principle of scenic structure. Successive entries and changes of lighting could also present an image of collective guilt. Yet reducing the final song to an exhortatory group recital would flatten the entire conflict. Before the song, slight gestures of embarrassment or avoidance of one another's eyes might endow the scene with greater dramatic maturity.

These acting possibilities show that the value of adaptation lies not only in adding new lines but in refashioning the theatrical effect of an older narrative germ. The limits of narrative preservation and transformation must now be considered together.

34. Preservation of the Original Plot and Assessment of Modern Alterations

The preface explicitly states that the basic plot is preserved while various changes have been made in incidents and acting form. This statement is foundational to criticism. The altered elements appear to include enlarged character episodes, a different arrangement of entrances, the comic functions of the Vidūṣaka, Kotwāl, and Mūlanāśaka, the collective use of songs, and the new ethical inflection of the dramatic conclusion.

The first achievement of the adaptation is accessibility in performance. Spectators need no longer cross the linguistic distance of the Sanskrit-Prakrit original: modern Maithili dialogue connects them immediately to the plot. Its second achievement is to state the question of female autonomy more explicitly at the end. Its third is to bring satire of the judiciary and the public sphere to life in contemporary ethical vocabulary.

The adaptation's limitations lie within these very strengths. In attempting to make the language accessible, dialogue at times becomes excessively explanatory; the abundance of songs may halt narrative movement; and the modern concluding ideal of public welfare may replace the farce's acute ethical uncertainty with a consolatory assurance. Naming these limits does not depreciate the adapter's labour; it establishes the aesthetic questions raised by adaptation.

A rigorous table of textual variants comparing the modern version with the original would require an edited source text, linguistic variants, manuscript readings, and a systematically aligned sequence of the modern dialogue. The present criticism establishes the need for such a record without inventing "original lines" beyond the available evidence.

The critical implications also reach into publishing practice. The more clearly the distinction between original and adaptation is recorded, the more readily readers, researchers, and theatre practitioners will recognise the work's different lives.

35. Editorial Preparation and Textual Accuracy

The worth of the 2020 edition is linked to its performance history; nevertheless, for the book to become a future research edition, certain formal improvements are necessary. These include consistency of spelling in the title (*Dhūrtasamāgama* / *Dhūrta Samāgama*) and character names, division of song metres, punctuation of dialogue, separate typography for lighting directions,

clarification of the relation between the earliest production and the writing of the script, and identification of how much of the medieval source survives in the volume. These matters could be organised in a textual editor's introduction.

Where possible, each song should be supplied with its melodic model, rhythmic cycle, ascending and descending phrases, or at least circumstances of use. Each performance could be listed by name, venue, date, director, cast variations, costumes, musician, and scenic designer. Where photographs show historical performances, their dates and venues should appear in captions. Such credits do more than acknowledge individuals: they become primary materials for future theatrical history.

A critical edition might present selected passages in parallel columns: "original Sanskrit/Prakrit line—Maithili translation—modern adaptation." Without such labour, it would be improper to declare a song "fully authenticated from the original." The present review verifies the songs, as far as possible, against the printed performance text of 2020; the textual purity of the medieval manuscript tradition is a separate research undertaking.

Together with these textual-editorial requirements, the archive of theatre history matters. Dates of productions and names of actors are not themselves proof of artistic effect, but they are reliable initial evidence for the continuity of theatrical labour.

36. The Work's Contribution to the Documentation of Maithili Theatre

The list of ten productions at the end of the volume demonstrates a practice of documentation uncommon in many published collections of plays. The first four productions are credited to the direction of Kauśala Kumāra Dāsa; later productions name Sañjīva Miśra and Ravindra Bihari Raju. From these particulars a broad trajectory emerges: the performance text passed through different generations and directorial perspectives.

The printed cast roster lists multiple names for individual characters, indicating several productions and revivals. It does not, however, connect each performer to an exact performance date. One therefore cannot properly infer from the available evidence that a named actor played a particular role on a particular date at a particular venue. Respect for this distinction is a matter of scholarly ethics.

To enlarge the public archive, the programmes of the Aripan group, directors' proofs, musical records, stage photographs, spectators' responses, and documents concerning awards could be collected. With reference to the Delhi production of 1988, the book mentions an award, but separate documentation is required to establish which institution conferred what award in which category. The completeness of a proposed theatre archive depends upon recovering these sources.

The historical evidence can support proposals for future theatrical work, but those proposals must not be passed off as descriptions of earlier productions. They remain open alternatives for contemporary directors to test.

37. A Proposed Framework for Contemporary Revival

A contemporary revival of this adaptation could give renewed relevance both to "the guru-disciple's roguery" and to "Anaṅgasenā's resistance." Before fixing a duration, the actual lengths of songs, performers' training, and the arrangement of scene changes should be measured. No imaginary assertion that the performance must last a particular number of minutes is being made.

A proposed first phase would involve a group reading in which every performer analyses the language of the character's costume and the character's private purpose. A second phase would address textual correction and musical adaptation of the songs; a third, movement and scenic composition; a fourth, comic timing; a fifth, the tone of the concluding resistance and the ensemble scene; and a sixth, collection of audience responses after limited open rehearsals. These phases are a checklist for a director, not an alleged history of previous productions.

A new production could also open with a short reading from the historical farce, preserving its linguistic distinctions, before introducing scenes from the modern adaptation. Thus the difference between original and adaptation would be experienced in performance rather than explained in a lecture. A trustworthy edition of the original text is, however, a prerequisite for the experiment.

38. A Dramaturgical Conclusion: Rasa, Structure, and Theatricality

The principal *rasa* of this farce is *hāsya* (the comic), but comedy does not remain constant because of the social ironies upon which it rests. The attraction of *śṛṅgāra* (the erotic) turns at several points into humiliation, jealousy, or frightening humour. The presence of other *rasas* must be judged scene by scene: the Kotwāl's entrance, for example, combines fear and laughter; the woman's refusal permits anger and pathos; the final speech invites an energetic collective feeling. Merely enumerating *rasas* destroys the dynamic nature of the drama. The question is how and why one emotional register yields to another.

Structurally, the new sequence of eight scenes moves from dispersed comic episodes towards judicial confrontation and public resistance. The work's energy moves from "let roguery be seen" to "let roguery be resisted." If that transition becomes perceptible in performance, the play may serve not merely as entertainment but as a collective exercise of civic judgement.

Without sufficient craft, however, the same design may produce the opposite effect: a long prologue at the beginning, disconnected comic episodes in the middle, and an abrupt sermon at the end. This is the adapter's creative risk and the accomplished director's challenge. Four resources appear necessary: distinct

character voices in dialogue, meaningful integration of song, disciplined dramatic lighting, and the gradual emergence of the woman's voice.

39. Overall Assessment: Achievement, Limitations, and Place in Literary History

The first achievement of the 2020 Maithili performance text of *Dhūrtasamāgama* is historical rediscovery. It reconnects contemporary Maithili spectators with the narrative germ, comic modes, and institutional ironies of an important farce by Jyotirīśvara. Its second achievement is to represent the collective practices of theatrical production: the book names writers, directors, musicians, actors, a chorus, and institutions. Its third is the sustained dramatic role of song. Its fourth is the timely reinterpretation of corrupt justice, acquisitive asceticism, and a woman's right of decision.

The limitations of the work include uncertainty about its distance from the original, certain sermonising speeches, potential interruptions of momentum through repetitive songs, the initial objectification of female characters, and the absence of a full apparatus of textual editing. These limitations raise major questions but do not negate its theatrical importance. On the contrary, they open possibilities for new productions and editorial revision based upon those questions.

Overall, it is more consistent with the evidence to describe this work as "an independent modern scenic construction founded upon the original farce's narrative germ" than as "a literal Maithili translation of Jyotirīśvara's original." This category of adaptation carries its own creative value and must be criticised accordingly. Acknowledging the distinction clarifies the contributions of both Jyotirīśvara and Arvind Akku.

40. Final Conclusion: Laughter That Asks Questions

The journey of *Dhūrtasamāgama* from Jyotirīśvara to Arvind Akku is, in effect, the journey of a play through its social life. The characters of a farce return to the stage; their costumes change, their language changes, and their songs acquire new meanings. Yet deception and the struggle over authority persist as questions for a new age. The play is therefore not an artefact to be locked away in the museum of literary history, but living material for theatre practitioners.

Its most enduring question is not simply whom to call a rogue. It is upon whose confidence roguery survives: the guru's followers, the judge's chair, the consumers of hypocrisy, and the silence imposed upon women. When Anaṅgasenā finally announces her decision publicly, the play moves from the mockery of the past into a civic question of the present. At this point the adaptation comes closest to fulfilling its historical responsibility.

The creation of a mature Maithili theatrical culture requires plays of this kind: the original text must be preserved, modern productions must enjoy creative

freedom, and criticism must sustain a conversation between them grounded in evidence. *Dhūrtasamāgama* is a testing ground for all three undertakings. The present review offers this examination not as a final verdict, but as a basis for further research, correction of the text, theatrical experiment, and public discussion.

Appendix 1. Sequence of Scenes and Critical Points

Scene	Principal theatrical situation	Narrative and critical function
First	Sūtradhāra and Naṭī; introduction to history; opening of the guru-disciple story	From prologue to the first signs of hypocrisy
Second	The Kotwāl enters; guru and disciple become afraid	Collision between disguised religion and punitive power
Third	Anaṅgasenā enters dancing	Attraction develops into claims of possession over a woman
Fourth	Alms, young man, Mṛtaṅgara Ṭhākura, Suratapriyā	Social support for hypocrisy and the questioning of that support
Fifth	Dispute over the dream-beauty	Growing intensity of desire and rivalry between guru and disciple
Sixth	Asajjāti Miśra's courtroom	Private dispute enters the realm of institutional corruption
Seventh	Anaṅgasenā's refusal; Mūlanāśaka's claim	Climactic collision of consent, debt, and the appropriation of justice
Eighth	Anaṅgasenā's address; concluding song	From personal resistance to public well-being

Appendix 2. Chronology of Ten Productions Recorded in the Book

Only the dates, venues, and directors as they occur in the book's concluding performance register are presented here. Incomplete particulars of venues or groups have not been supplied by conjecture.

No.	Date	Organiser / venue	Director
1	09.08.1986	Bharatiya Nritya Kala Mandir, Patna	Kauśala Kumāra Dāsa
2	28.02.1987	Bharatiya Nritya Kala Mandir, Patna	Kauśala Kumāra Dāsa
3	28.04.1988	Fifth International Theatre Festival, Pyare Lal Bhavan, New Delhi	Kauśala Kumāra Dāsa

No.	Date	Organiser / venue	Director
4	19.01.1992	Anil Mukherjee Memorial Theatre Festival, Kalidas Rangalaya, Patna	Kauśala Kumāra Dāsa
5	04.08.2007	"Bhīmabhāk" production, Vidyapati Bhavan, Patna	Sañjīva Miśra
6	20.12.2015	Vidyapati Parva Festival, Rajiv Nagar, Patna	Ravindra Bihari Raju
7	13.02.2016	Maithili Literature Festival, Youth Hostel, Fraser Road, Patna	Ravindra Bihari Raju
8	12.2019	Theatre festival organised by Chetna Samiti, Kalidas Rangalaya, Patna	Ravindra Bihari Raju
9	07.03.2020	Cultural evening, The Himalayan Public School, Sarisab Pahi, Madhubani	Ravindra Bihari Raju
10	08.03.2020	Jamsham, Pandaul, Madhubani; Durga Sthan	Ravindra Bihari Raju

The entry for the eighth performance gives only "12.2019"; no day of the month has been inferred. The register is documentary evidence supplied by the volume, not a substitute for an independently corroborated archive drawn from the various organisations involved.

Appendix 3. Characters and Their Dramatic Functions

Character	Principal dramatic function	Possible theatrical sign
Sūtradhāra	Historical introduction and opening of scenes	Direct address, hand gesture, contact with audience
Naṭī	Questions introductory claims; companion in theatrical judgement	Interrogative gaze, rhythmic dissent
Viśvanagara	Hypocrisy, desire, and possession under a guru's disguise	Appearance of detachment, sudden display of desire
Snātaka	Imitation of the guru and competition with him	Comic mimicry of the guru's gestures
Kotwāl	Fear of authority and popular humour	Rhythm of the staff, roars, measured pauses
Young man	Brief intrusion of social reality	Everyday bodily language, disbelief
Mṛtaṅgara Ṭhākura	Social hunger for prestige and uncritical faith	Giving and honouring, gestures of indecision
Suratapriyā	Challenges hypocrisy	Oblique gaze, explicit rebuttal

Character	Principal dramatic function	Possible theatrical sign
Anaṅgasenā	From object of desire to public speaker	From dancing entrance to central light at the close
Asajjāti Miśra	Irony of judicial authority	Raised seat, formal voice, self-interested action
Vidūṣaka	Judge's companion and agile figure of self-interest	Rapid reactions, verbal satire
Mūlanāśaka	Debt claim and reversal of the balance of power	Sudden entrance, bodily humour
Chorus	Alternative narrator, commentator, transition-maker	Direction of rhythm, collective response

Appendix 4. Evidentiary Basis and Levels of Verification

Evidence from the book itself. The title page, publishing information, preface, the adapter's statement, scene texts, production register, and cast lists. These establish the existence of the 2020 edition, the account of the beginning of script preparation in 1985, eight scenes, ten recorded productions, and the forms of the dialogues and songs.

Published research. The multilingual character of the original, its two-act farcical form, the scripts in which manuscripts survive, and the dating of Jyotirīśvara have been taken from publications by historical and contemporary scholars. Disagreements over language, chronology, and interpretation have been stated where different conclusions exist.

Critical inference. Lighting techniques, acting choices, rhythm, scenic treatment of the female characters, transitions, alternatives in design, and potential effects upon audiences are analytical suggestions advanced by this review. They do not claim independent observation of productions beyond the published text.

Future verification. Further essential sources include different editions of the medieval original; manuscripts from Nepal where accessible; comparative evidence concerning Prakrit and Maithili songs; and films, programmes, records of awards, and contemporary newspaper reviews relating to productions between 1986 and 2020. These materials would strengthen the criticism.

Appendix 5. Specific Questions for Future Research

1. How much of the dialogue in Jyotirīśvara's original farce is preserved in substance in the performance text of 2020, and how much is additional material created in adaptation?

2. What continuities and ruptures exist between the Maithili songs of the original and those of 2020 in wording, melody, and dramatic function?

3. How does the new eight-scene sequence, through changes in the points at which songs enter, direct the audience's laughter?

4. How does the social force of medieval judicial satire change when it is translated into the language of the modern courtroom and public policy?

5. Does Anaṅgasenā's final resistance genuinely reverse her earlier objectification, or does it remain a belated moral appendix?

6. What critical criteria are appropriate to the reception by contemporary audiences of the social and caste images in the name "Asajjāti" and other names?

7. If documentation from productions in 1986, 1988, 2007, 2016, and 2020 becomes available, how might a history of their styles, music, and temporal arrangements be written?

8. How can literary history give the collective work of Maithili theatre groups and choruses its due share of credit?

Bibliography: The Book and Verified External Studies

1. **Primary text.** Jyotirīśvara Ṭhākura (original author); Dr Arvind Akku (performance text). *Dhūrtasamāgama (A Maithili Play)*. Navārambha, Madhubani/Patna, first edition, 2020. ISBN 978-81-944116-3-5.

2. Ripuñjaya Kumāra Ṭhākura. "The Dhūrtasamāgama of Jyotirīśvara: A Manuscriptological Exploration of Linguistic Diversity, Nāṭya Tradition and Judiciary System." *Gyan Bharatam: Book of Abstracts*, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, 11–13 September 2025. Conference abstract, not a full research monograph. https://culture.gov.in/files/reports_documents/Book_Abstracts.pdf

3. Somdatta Hati. "Dhūrtasamāgama: A Study." *International Journal of Academic Research and Development*, vol. 2, no. 5, September 2017. A study of the original play's linguistic form, farcical tradition, and plot. https://www.allstudiesjournal.com/assets/archives/2017/vol2issue5/2-6-196-597.pdf

4. Dr Bijayendra Jha and Nishu Kumari. "Maithili Dhurtasamagam Written by Jyotirishwar: An Analysis." *International Journal of Engineering Development and Research*, vol. 14, no. 1, January 2026. Its religious-sectarian reading is one particular interpretation, not an exclusively established conclusion. https://rjwave.org/ijedr/viewpaperforall.php?paper=IJEDR2601212

5. A. Berriedale Keith. *The Sanskrit Drama in Its Origin, Development, Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924; section "The Prahasana and the Bhāṇa." Presents a later position concerning the author's date; its disagreement with modern manuscript research deserves attention. https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/74314

6. Nisha Thakur. "The Non-Producing Class and Trade in Mithila in Thirteenth-Fourteenth Century." *Journal of Indian History and Culture*, no. 22, September 2016. Context for the social and economic significance of Jyotirīśvara's writing and the discussion of Brahmanical authority. https://journalcpriir.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2016-journal-22nd-issue_web.pdf

7. Textual entry for Jyotirīśvara Ṭhākura's *Dhūrta-samāgama*, Jiva Gaudiya Grantha Mandira, a collection of Sanskrit texts, including a note on conflicting chronologies. This supplies information about the availability of the original text; the present study has not collated that web text line by line. https://grantha.jiva.org/index.php?e_no=536&show=entry

8. Supplementary literary-historical source: "Theatre and Dramatic Cultures," *A Parallel History of Mithilā, Vajjī and Aṅga*, vol. 2, chapter 50. Cited for its distinction between evidence from dramatic documents and evidence of performance history. https://videha-ejournal.github.io/mithila-vajji-anga/research-articles/history/volume-2/chapter-050/

Note on textual variants. The conference abstract of 2025 has not been presented as a complete published research paper, nor has the chronological opinion in the work of 1924 been treated as final proof. The songs and dialogue quoted in this review come from the performance text of 2020; their exhaustive collation with a critical text of the medieval original remains a separate research task.

Prabhāvatīharaṇa: Literary and Theatrical Analysis

Part One: A Comprehensive Literary and Theatrical Study

1. The Premise of the Study, Its Textual Basis, and Categories of Evidence

To describe *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* merely as a mythological romance or an old courtly musical drama would be to diminish its literary significance. It is simultaneously a narrative of love, a strategy devised by the gods against a demon king, a courtly representation of its own cultural identity, a dramatic composition dominated by songs in multiple rāgas, a collection of indications concerning public performance, and a document of seventeenth-century contact between Mithilā and Nepal. The tensions among these levels constitute the play's real critical importance.

This study keeps three kinds of evidence distinct. First is the edited, printed text of Jagatprakāśa Malla's play: dramatic verses, characters' utterances, entrance directions, act endings, the index of songs, and the editorial introduction. Second are Lekhanātha Miśra's own judgements, which cannot be treated as statements by the original author: for example, his doubts about authorship, his count of seventy-five songs, and his conjecture concerning an open stage. Third are comparative findings drawn from Rāmadeva Jhā's Sahitya Akademi study, Rāmāvatāra Yādava's research, Makoto Kitada's recent studies, and other historical writing on theatre. Wherever the text does not answer a question directly, an inference is identified as an inference.

The original dramatic text is divided into three acts. Following the play are an index of songs, an index of Sanskrit verses, and a list of reference works. Using these materials and the editorial introduction, the present inquiry undertakes a comparative examination of plot construction, musical organisation, and theatrical practice, with attention to episodes, characters, and the succession of events.

Rather than imposing a meaning upon the work, the review adopts a set of primary tests: Which event advances the action? Which song draws the spectator into an emotional state? Which stage direction indicates the practical conduct of performance? Which convention discloses the ideology of its age? Instead of issuing an immediate verdict according to modern standards of equality or inequality, we should first listen to the play within its own historical dramaturgy.

1.1 The Limits of Textual Evidence

The orthography of an old text, difficult words in some songs, and the editorial conversion of a Newar-script manuscript into printed Devanagari allow more

than one reading of a given letter form. Direct quotations selected for this study have therefore been kept quite limited. Instead of reproducing lengthy songs word for word, the discussion examines their meanings, dramatic uses, and scenic contexts. This restraint is a form of respect for the original text, not a weakness of analysis.

2. The Physical Book and Its Editorial History

The title page of the edition used here reads *Prabhāvatīharaṇa Nāṭaka*, composed by Jagatprakāśa Malla, and identifies Dr Lekhanātha Miśra as editor. The publication details record a first edition in 1972 and a reprint in 2013. The reprint is a significant cultural fact: many years after its initial publication, the need was still felt to make this old Maithili play accessible again. Reprinting, however, does not automatically resolve problems of the text.

At the beginning of the volume there is a copy of a letter written by Suniti Kumar Chatterji on 27 September 1972. The letter praises the enterprise of editing the Maithili plays of Nepal. It is certainly a document of recognition from an external intellectual authority; nevertheless, it would be wrong to treat it as independent authentication of every textual decision or historical claim. A scholar's encouragement and manuscript-based critical evidence are different matters.

The editor's *Viṣaya-Praveśa* (Introduction to the Subject) is itself a brief history of drama. It discusses the linguistic relations between Nepal and Mithilā, literary patronage under the Mallas, the dramatist's life, the manuscript, date of composition, synopsis, theatrical space, songs, rāgas and rāginīs, and editorial methods. For the present-day reader this introduction has a double value: it documents the scholarship of its own period, and some of its findings deserve re-examination in the light of newer archival research.

The final portion of the volume is not simply an appendix but a research instrument. The song index records the sequence of opening lines; the verse index guides readers to the opening expressions of Sanskrit stanzas; the bibliography reveals the editor's intellectual foundation. A future critical edition could use these materials to construct a combined index of textual locations, rāgas, characters, scenes, and manuscript variants.

3. The Shared Theatrical World of Nepal and Mithilā

To regard the Malla courts of medieval Nepal as a place 'outside' the literature of Mithilā would be historically narrow. Courtly contacts, the circulation of manuscripts, patronage of scholars, marriage alliances, religious festivals, and shared practices of musical theatre established Maithili within Nepal's royal cultural life. Lekhanātha Miśra's introduction presents an older scholarly account of these many-layered connections.

Rāmadeva Jhā's *Jagatprakāśamalla* (Sahitya Akademi, 1990) discusses in detail the language of the plays, entrance songs, their predominantly sung form, and the organisation of place in Malla compositions. Recent scholarship, too, has made the multilingual life of Malla courts—the contact among Maithili, Nepal Bhasa, Sanskrit, and regional speech forms—a serious subject of inquiry. Yet to say that 'Maithili was a prestigious court language' does not imply that all performers, spectators, and theatrical techniques belonged to one linguistic community. Linguistic coordination was a process of production, not a purely monolingual system.

The songs of the play should be understood within this common cultural terrain. Gods, demons, women characters, and troupes resembling comic performers express feeling in Maithili songs; Sanskrit stanzas introduce characters; and the editorial introduction refers to the Newar script and stage directions. This mixture is better regarded as evidence of a layered history of performance than as an imperfection or linguistic corruption.

A particular historical danger arises here. To confine Malla-period theatre within modern national frontiers and contemporary disputes about the 'ownership of a language' obscures the text's actual cultural movement. Its Maithili literary character and its involvement in Nepalese theatre can both be true at the same time. This paired perspective allows a more productive evaluation of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*.

4. Date, Authorship, and the Discipline of Disagreement

On the basis of the date-bearing stanza within the play and the Nepal Era reckoning, the editor assigns its composition to Nepal Samvat 776, that is, 1656 CE (see the editorial introduction and the ending of the play). Subsequent scholarship has also generally accepted 1656. But the date on which a written manuscript was completed, the date of the work's first performance, and the date at which a surviving copy was transcribed are not self-evidently identical. These three questions must be considered separately in any chronological analysis.

Lekhanātha Miśra is unusually candid about his doubts concerning authorship. The name Jagatprakāśa in the signatures (*bhaṇitā*) of songs and the authorial attribution at the play's conclusion support Jagatprakāśa Malla's claim. Yet the mention of Vaṃśamaṇi Jhā in a description of the king leads the editor to imagine that some of the composition may have been the work of Maithil scholars, with the king's name added to the signatures. Miśra himself concedes that this alternative rests more heavily upon conjecture than upon direct evidence. The critic's duty is not to conceal that uncertainty.

Rāmadeva Jhā's monograph offers comparative material on Jagatprakāśa Malla's writings and theatrical tradition. Research by Rāmāvatāra Yādava (published in 2019, based on a lecture of 2015) illuminates a rare Newar-script manuscript of Jagatprakāśa's Maithili *bārahamāsā* songs. Makoto Kitada's 2026 study offers new insight into the intimate memory and voice of bereavement associated with

his friend Candraśekharasiṃha in Jagatprakāśa's writings in Maithili and Nepal Bhasa. Together, these works help establish Jagatprakāśa's multilingual authorship, but they do not independently settle the personal authorship of each song in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*.

The practical conclusion is therefore this: in the available printed tradition the work may properly be received as 'composed by Jagatprakāśa Malla', while any future critical edition must examine the relationships among surviving manuscripts, the final colophon, the distribution of signatures, and the reference to Vaṃśamaṇi Jhā. The distinction between 'conclusive evidence' and 'possible collaborative composition' must be maintained; a new author's name cannot be invented to close the gap.

5. From Manuscript to Printed Text: Questions of Textual Criticism

According to the editor, a manuscript once held in the Bir Library was subsequently preserved in Nepal's National Archives. It was written on Nepalese paper in the Newar script, and the editor also records its number of leaves and lines. The significance of this information is not merely archaeological: it demonstrates that the printed Devanagari text is not a direct facsimile of the original visible letter forms but an edited conversion.

At the end of his introduction Miśra himself notes that certain Newar letters, particularly *ra/la* and *va/ba*, present difficult choices. He separated words that had been written continuously in the manuscript according to his own judgement, and regularised the grammar of some Sanskrit verses. Such interventions made the text more readable, but modern scholarship requires a complete record of each intervention. A three-column presentation of manuscript reading, edited reading, and possible emendation would strengthen the study's reliability.

To discard the refrains, stanza divisions, rāga names, indications such as *co*, act divisions, expressions such as 'in the first corner'/'in the second corner', or backstage directions would amount to destroying evidence of theatrical history. These are not decorations of writing but practical signals for performance. A future digital text should make the beginning and end, character, rāga, act, and stage movement of every song separately identifiable.

Another precaution concerns the text's historical transmission: the copy used here does not provide a complete comparative record of which errors in the 1972 text were corrected in the 2013 reprint, which fresh corrections were introduced, or which passages were reproduced without alteration. It would therefore be mistaken automatically to describe the reprint as a new critical edition.

6. The Three-Act Plot: A Close Examination of Narrative Sequence

6.1 Act One: Invocation of the Theatre and the Seeds of Conflict

The play opens with auspicious recollections of Gaṇeśa, Śiva, and the Goddess in a *nāndī* song. Thereafter the dialogue between Sūtradhāra and Naṭī makes the theatrical act self-conscious: *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* will be performed at the king's command. Praise of the king, description of the country, and the performers' assumption of roles together make this beginning religious, political, and theatrical. Before the story itself commences, the drama takes the constitution of its own stage as its subject.

Śrīkṛṣṇa, Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā, Gada, Sāraṇa, Pradyumna, and Sāmba are introduced largely through Sanskrit stanzas. To today's reader this long procedure of introduction may seem slow; in performance, however, it may have enabled formal identification of the characters, the establishment of costumes and rank, and the sounding of entrance music. The arrival of Indra, Jayanta, and Haṃsa-Haṃsī then reveals the hidden political objective: the union of Prabhāvatī and Pradyumna will be not merely a romantic event but the instrument of the demon king Vajranābha's destruction.

On the other side, Vajranābha's city and household are introduced: Queen Premavatī, his daughter Prabhāvatī, Sunābha, Sunīti, Candrāvatī, Guṇavatī, and others. The enemy camp in the poet's theatrical scheme is not simply a place of violent darkness; it also possesses urban beauty, a lake, family life, a court, and aesthetic sensibility. The dramatic field of conflict is therefore not wholly one-sided, although the moral direction of the eventual victory is clearly aligned with Kṛṣṇa's party.

Haṃsa and Haṃsī enter the lake; Vajranābha asks why they have come. The action ends the first day's performance at the point of wonder created by a pair of unfamiliar creatures. This pause has a dramatic advantage: by the end of the first night the spectators know the characters and the clandestine task to follow, but the actual romantic encounter has yet to occur.

6.2 Act Two: Love Before Union, Mediation, and the Secret Meeting

The second act begins with the explicit direction 'Now on the second day'. After scenes at Kṛṣṇa's court and the lake, Prabhāvatī meets Haṃsa and Haṃsī. Haṃsī becomes a messenger of love and describes Pradyumna's virtues. The hostility between her father and Kṛṣṇa makes Prabhāvatī's decision difficult: personal desire and inherited political enmity stand face to face.

Prabhāvatī's feeling does not arise all at once. The description of a suitable bridegroom, remembrance of her father's opposition, the friend's persuasion, and songs of separation together form a gradual sequence of *pūrvarāga*, love before union. Haṃsī teaches her how to arrange a meeting between the king and the pair of swans. Having heard of the performer Bhadra's skill, Vajranābha orders him to be summoned to court. This royal command opens a breach in the

political security apparatus: the king himself provides a means of entry to his enemies.

Pradyumna and his companions enter the city disguised as actors. After the performance by Bhadra's troupe, Pradyumna assumes the form of a bee upon a flower garland and reaches Prabhāvatī's inner apartments. The image combines mythological magical power, the bee-and-lotus analogy of lyric poetry, and the visual resources of theatrical illusion. In the language of contemporary theatre, it is one of the play's outstanding scenes of transformation.

With Haṃsī's mediation, the secret union takes place. Here the love songs do not merely halt the action: they give dramatic form to the heroine's psychological changes, physical longing, and hesitation. The second act concludes after songs in which Candrāvatī and Guṇavatī express their sense of deprivation. The unresolved tension of the narrative remains: love has succeeded, but it has not gained public recognition within the royal family.

6.3 Act Three: From the Expansion of Love to Battle and Kingship

Act Three opens with 'Now on the third day'. Observing a change in Prabhāvatī's conduct, Candrāvatī and Guṇavatī detect signs of secret love. Both express their desire for life partners. Through Pradyumna's mediation, Candrāvatī is paired with Gada and Guṇavatī with Sāmba. What began as a single romance expands into the circumstances of three couples.

Elsewhere, Vajranābha's meeting with his father, the sage Kaśyapa, discussion of the *rājasūya* sacrifice, and the king's political ambition fill out the political dimension. In parallel, news reaches the king through the queen that a man is present in Prabhāvatī's quarters. So long as the messenger's secret plan remained protected, the lovers held the advantage; once the news escapes, the impulse arises to transform the conflict into open warfare.

Furious at the presence of a man in his daughter's inner quarters, Vajranābha surrounds Pradyumna and his companions. Following Kṛṣṇa's arrival and the battle, Vajranābha is killed. The victorious Pradyumna receives the throne of Vajrapura. The conclusion then moves through the return of all to Dvārakā, the introduction of the new brides to the family, devotion to God, the sentiment of tranquillity, and auspicious prayers.

Love's fulfilment, the demon's death, and the coronation are thus three forms of a single resolution. A question arises: does the play affirm the autonomous value of love, or does it turn love into an instrument of a divine political objective? Both tendencies coexist in the text; it would be precipitate to reduce it to either one alone.

7. A Play within the Play: The Significance of the Rāmāyaṇa Performance

One of the most intriguing theatrical features of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* is the episode in which Bhadra the actor performs the 'Rāmāyaṇa' in Vajranābha's court. Following the king's command to 'dance the Rāmāyaṇa', the troupe presents the episode of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, Vibhāṇḍaka, King Lomapāda, and the courtesans. It creates a self-contained performance within the story, introduces fresh characters, speeches and disguises, and establishes a separate arrangement of spectators.

This internal play fulfils three purposes. First, it legitimises the entry of outside performers before the demon king and creates a formal occasion for bringing enemies into his assembly. Second, the story of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga in the Rāmāyaṇa concerns a complex relationship between women's attraction and the achievement of a political end; this has an indirect relationship of suggestion with the principal drama's strategy of Haṃsī's mediation and Prabhāvatī's marriage. Third, the episode offers evidence of the possible staging, at a Malla-period court, of one performance by a troupe within another performance, and of a doubled level of spectatorship.

From a theatrical perspective the primary audience sees the performers as men acting assumed roles; Vajranābha sees them as remarkable artists; and readers of the actual story know their concealed purpose. This inequality of knowledge creates dramatic irony. What the spectators recognise as deception, the character understands as art. The episode is therefore not merely a diversion: it is an internal commentary upon the relationship of deception, acting, and power.

The Rāmāyaṇa episode also introduces the risk of prolixity. The central romance temporarily withdraws from the stage; a modern abridged production might find the passage lengthy. Removing it altogether, however, would destroy the play's self-reflexive structure, Vajranābha's deception, and the historical evidence of theatrical skill. The better solution is to shorten the internal performance proportionately, while retaining its transformations and its two-tier arrangement of spectators.

8. Plot Architecture: Movement, Obstruction, and Resolution

The sequence of the outer action is straightforward: the announcement of enmity, a secret plan of love, entry, union, disclosure, conflict, and victory. The internal structure is more complex. Earlier protocols of introduction, scenic songs, dialogue by the lake, the play within the play, the transformation into a bee, conversations between female companions, episodes in the forest hermitage, battle, and ritual procedures at the close divide the linear story into several relatively autonomous units of performance. The play's 'pace' therefore cannot be measured solely by a modern expectation of events succeeding one another rapidly.

Dramatic expectation has three sources. First, the audience already knows Haṃsa-Haṃsī's true purpose. Second, the collision between Prabhāvatī's desire and Vajranābha's prohibition increases the risk surrounding the hoped-for union. Third, once the secret relationship is revealed, battle becomes unavoidable. These three levels compose a structure of 'foreknowledge—anticipation—eruption'.

Numerous brief exchanges effect changes of location through commands of action such as 'Come', 'Certainly', 'Enter', and 'Rest'. On the printed page these may seem dry or repetitive, but on stage they are distinct signals of actors' movement, musical interludes, costume changes, and scenic transitions. Drama as read and drama as enacted need to be approached differently here.

The resolution also calls for criticism. Once Prabhāvatī's love is fulfilled, the play celebrates Vajranābha's death and Pradyumna's coronation. It does not independently explore the defeated family's grief or the problems of political succession in any depth. The mythological moral order rapidly stabilises the scene. The ideological limits of the drama are visible in this asymmetry of resolution.

9. Interpretation of Character: Love, Power, Statecraft, and Mediation

9.1 Prabhāvatī: The Expression of Desire and the Limits of Independence

Prabhāvatī is the emotional centre of the play. At her first encounter with Haṃsī, she hears the messenger's account and remembers her father's opposition, but gradually becomes receptive to the possibility of love. In this scene the heroine is not a passive prize: she asks questions, considers the choice of a husband for herself, and requests a means of action from the messenger. The songs of separation express the inward heat of love.

Nevertheless, Prabhāvatī's wish is not presented at court as an independent social decision. Her relationship gains legitimacy through secret union, a divine plan, and victory by a male warrior. This contradiction should be central to the interpretation of her character: desire is active in language and feeling but dependent upon others within the structures of power.

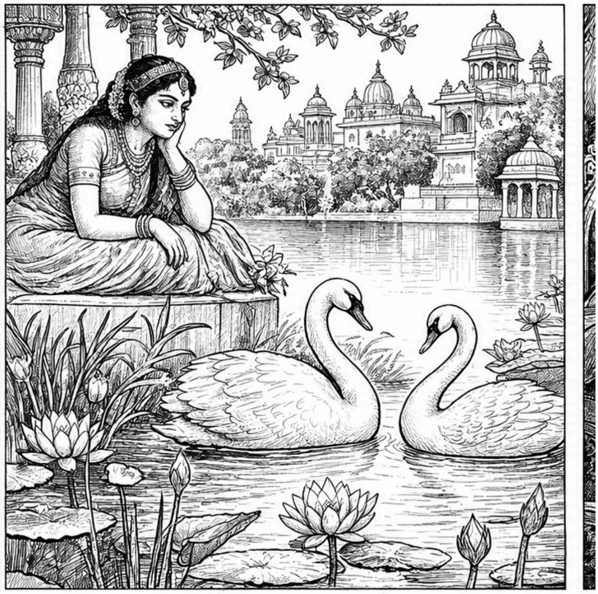
9.2 Pradyumna: Warrior, Actor, and Lover

Pradyumna is at once Kṛṣṇa's son, the desired bridegroom, an actor in disguise, the infiltrator who assumes the form of a bee, and the conqueror of the demons. The contradictions between these roles constitute much of the work's fascination. He is not only an archer and martial hero, but a performer who gains access through artifice and deception to an enemy's seemingly impregnable inner palace. Here warfare begins not with weapons but with acting.

Pradyumna's character balances the gestures of love with political duty, but his inward ethical conflict is limited. The play does not question the sanctity of his

objective, because the ascendancy of the divine party of Kṛṣṇa is assumed in advance. If a contemporary actor embodied the fear of clandestine entry, the uncertainties of love, and the risks of warfare, a psychologically deeper figure might emerge from the otherwise rather flat heroic type. This is a directorial proposal, not a direction found in the original text.

9.3 Haṃsī: The Principal Agent of the Entire Narrative



At the lake: two swans, the princess, and the mediated approach to love

Without Haṃsī, the romance and the plan to destroy the demon king would come to a standstill. She receives Indra's instructions, recognises Prabhāvatī's feelings, proposes the possibility of love, praises the troupe of actors before Vajranābha, and mediates the union. It is thus insufficient to describe her merely as a comic bird or a bearer of messages. She functions almost as the dramatic manager of the narrative.

Haṃsī's power resides in speech, resourcefulness, and mobility. She crosses the boundaries of court, lake, and inner apartments: where Prabhāvatī's movement is constrained, Haṃsī enters freely. Yet this freedom is subordinate to the purpose assigned by Indra. In this character we can observe the intricate conjunction of a feminine speaking agency with the status of an instrument of divine action.

9.4 Vajranābha: Kingship, Artistic Taste, and Pride

To reduce Vajranābha to a mere emblem of wicked opposition is to miss a distinctive feature of the play. He is also a ruler with an interest in the city, the court, his family, music, and theatrical performance. It is his order to see

Bhadra's acting that allows the enemy to enter his capital. His taste for art is not, in this view, simply a personal weakness, but an irony inherent in the performative nature of kingship: the spectacle that ought to enhance his glory opens a path towards his defeat.

His anger belongs to a socially and politically constituted patriarchy. On hearing that a man is present in his daughter's inner quarters, he turns principally towards war rather than dialogue or an inquiry into justice. The play condemns him in advance through his demonic identity; a modern reader may also ask how fear concerning family, kingdom, and reputation operates beneath the religious covering of enmity.

9.5 Kṛṣṇa, Indra, and the Secondary Characters

Kṛṣṇa is the source of the overarching plan and of the military resolution; Indra supplies the initial impetus; Sāraṇa and other supporting characters provide instruments for entrances and operations. The pairings of Gada and Sāmba with Candrāvatī and Guṇavatī confer a symmetrical pattern upon the main romance. Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā establish both the domestic-divine world of beauty at the opening and the circle of acceptance at the end.

Queen Premavatī's conveyance of information intensifies the conflict in the third act. The Kaśyapa episode introduces the moral world of royal duty, counsel, and the forest hermitage. Taken together, the smaller roles allotted to these supporting figures form a social and spatial pattern of 'inner apartments—court—divine realm—hermitage'. Although their textual scope is limited, their collective practical significance on stage is considerable.

10. Women's Experience, Dialogue among Companions, and the Politics of Marriage

Two distinct questions must be posed when considering the women in the play. First, to what extent do they make decisions for themselves within its action? Second, to what extent do their songs enlarge the experience of the narrative? In *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* these questions do not have the same answer. The heroine's lyrical voice is relatively rich, but the resolution of social destiny takes place within the recognised structures of marriage and masculine authority. Here lies the subtle difficulty of reading a historical text through contemporary understandings of gender justice.

In the lakeside conversation between Prabhāvatī and Haṃsī, the delay in the young woman's marriage is presented as a source of sorrow. Yet it is within the same conversation that her choice begins to take shape. Haṃsī does more than advocate marriage: she describes the prospective bridegroom's qualities and counters the objection of political hostility. Emotional desire is, accordingly, being formed through linguistic exchange. Love is not simply a sudden gift from the gods; it is also a product of dialogue.

In the songs at the end of Act Two, Candrāvatī and Guṇavatī express their sense of deprivation. A declaration such as 'A helpless woman has no beauty without a husband' makes explicit the marriage-centred social imagination of women's lives. Such a statement should not be accepted without the critical judgement of the present: it reveals a socially constructed desire of characters belonging to their age, not necessarily the complete sum of the dramatist's thought about women.

In Act Three, Candrāvatī and Guṇavatī discover the secrecy of love by noticing changes in Prabhāvatī's bodily conduct. This perceptiveness exemplifies the experiential knowledge of female companionship. Yet when they seek marriages of their own, Prabhāvatī and Pradyumna become their decisive intermediaries. The solidarity between companions is affirmative, but the final social arrangement does not offer an open public space for independent decisions by women.

Premavatī has a different role. She brings news of her daughter's clandestine relationship to the centre of power. Among the women of a single household, we encounter different voices of desire, secrecy, support, and discipline. A reading that asserts 'all the women agree' would extinguish the text's plurality of voices. Nor is it enough to dismiss the queen's conduct as merely negative morality: she acts within a complex arrangement of dynastic interests, control over bodies, and the exchange of information between husband and wife.

In theatrical presentation, the inner rhythms, silences, glances, and mutual distances of the women's songs are extremely important. Giving all the women the same voice or the same dance movements erases dramatic differences. Prabhāvatī's love before union, Haṃsī's ingenuity, Candrāvatī's curiosity, Guṇavatī's spontaneous longing, and Premavatī's apprehension should each possess a distinctive visual character.

11. The Dramatic Functions of Song: Singing, Narration, and Emotional Transformation

According to Lekhanātha Miśra's count, the play contains seventy-five Maithili songs (editorial introduction). This number is not proof of music attached as ornament to an otherwise songless plot; rather, it reveals the play's fundamental method of composition. Invocation, royal eulogy, character entrances, description of places, love, separation, incitement to battle, victory, tranquillity, and benediction—at every turning point song gives the story its form.

Five principal functions of song can be identified. First, the entrance and identification of new characters; second, the imaginative construction of scenic locations; third, the disclosure of emotional conditions left unspoken by the plot; fourth, the provision of bridges between events; fifth, the creation of communal devotion and aesthetic experience among spectators. Some songs perform more than one of these functions. For example, a love song in a flower garden both establishes the scene and evokes the erotic sentiment of union; an

invocation establishes the relationship of actors and audience while making both a religious and a theatrical appeal.

The spoken exchanges are brief. A critic who sees such abbreviated utterances as 'Come', 'Certainly', 'Tell me', or 'Enter' and judges the play to be weak in dialogue has considered only half the evidence. In the complete scenic system, spoken words advance the plot, songs develop the characters' emotions, rāgas supply emotional markers, and physical acting extends meaning. The criteria of the modern printed 'dialogue-centred play' cannot be applied here without alteration.

Conversely, it would be no more reasonable to assume that every song is equally indispensable in dramatic terms. Certain royal panegyrics, repetitive descriptions of beauty, or general songs of benediction slow the immediate progress of events. In their original cultural setting this slowing could amount to an expansion of theatrical *rasa*, while it may have a different effect upon modern spectators. A just critical approach recognises the songs' historical value but tests the purpose of each one in actual production.

The repeated appearance of Jagatprakāśa's authorial signature in the songs connects the composition with royal poetry. The character's identity and the composer's voice are present at the same moment. It would be inappropriate here to demand, in the manner of modern psychological realism, that a character remain enclosed within a wholly autonomous fictional world. The songs remind their hearers that they are watching a mythic story sung in a specific royal and literary environment.

12. Rāgas, Rāginīs, and the Structure of Musical Drama

The editorial introduction lists numerous rāgas: Nāṭa, Kauśika, Mālava, Mallārī, Vasanta, Sāraṅga, Barāṛī, Pahaṛiyā, Gauṛī, Vibhāsa, Dhanāśrī, Āsāvarī, Bhairavī, Gauṛī-Pañcama, and others. Above many songs in the original text appear rāga names, indications resembling rhythms, or designations of musical forms. It is immediately clear that the poet's dramaturgy extends beyond the literary lines of a song: the possibility of singing and musical presentation is intrinsic to it.

The presence of a rāga name establishes only that a song was conceived or performed within a musical classification. To reconstruct from that name alone the exact melodic sequence, ascending and descending scales, parent scale, rhythm, or original tune of 1656 according to present-day Hindustani practice would be a historical error. Identical rāga names can designate differing melodic practices across periods, regions, and traditions. Each melody composed by a musician today should therefore be termed a new theatrical reconstruction, not the recovery of the original tune.

In the musical structure, a sign such as *dhru* indicates the repeated principal line or refrain. On stage a refrain can become an emotional memory for the audience. A musical repetition is not required at the conclusion of every scene;

nevertheless, if a central aesthetic feeling is retained as a mnemonic motif and made to resonate between scenes, a contemporary production can preserve the spirit of the older lyric tradition.

The instrumentation might change with the character of the song: auspicious group singing in the invocation; delicate sound and a rhythm of avian movement beside the lake; moderate tempo and restrained voices in the inner apartments; conspicuous rhythm in the actor troupe's Rāmāyaṇa performance; rapid cycles in battle; and an ensemble of voices in the final passage of peace. This is a possible stage design, not an authenticated musical instruction from the manuscript.

A work dominated by music succeeds on stage only insofar as acting and singing remain responsive to each other. If a song becomes a display of virtuosity at the expense of the singer-character's feeling, the intimacy of love is broken. If it is reduced merely to background music, the characters lose their historical right to 'speak by singing'. A combined plan of dialogic singing by actor-singers and narrative music is therefore preferable.

13. Rasa, Bhāva, Dhvani, and Aesthetic Evaluation

From the standpoint of *rasa*, the centre of the play is *śṛṅgāra*, the erotic sentiment, but it is not the only one. Before the lovers first meet there is *pūrvarāga* (love before union), at the secret meeting *saṃyoga* (union), under the threat of separation *viraha* (longing), in battle *vīra* and *raudra* (the heroic and furious), and in the invocations and conclusion the effects of devotion and tranquillity. The entire emotional journey is not uniform: it proceeds from the longing of love to a collective assurance of victory.

The attraction arising in Prabhāvatī's mind when Haṃsī describes Pradyumna makes the foundational object (*ālambana*) and stimulating determinants (*uddīpana*) of *śṛṅgāra* available through the language of song. The lake, forest, flower garland, and bee provide natural imagery for this emotion. In modern terminology these might look like romantic embellishments, but in the Sanskrit-Maithili poetic tradition images of nature are resources for communicating feeling.

The episode of 'perching upon a flower garland in the form of a bee' does not simply evoke the sentiment of wonder. It also carries a subtle suggestion (*dhvani*) of love's clandestine entry. Floral fragrance, the bee's attraction, and the forbidden boundary of the inner apartments converge in a single visual image. At this point the poet turns a visual metaphor into a device of plot: this may be regarded as one of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*'s most successful unions of poetry and theatre.

The furious and heroic sentiments become prominent in the last act, although the psychological development of the battle is relatively slight. The play has already fixed the direction of divine victory, and thus uncertainty resides more in

the momentum of staged events than in the outcome of the conflict. A musical display of heroism might compensate for this narrative limitation; even so, the text's morally linear account of martial triumph is plain to see.

At the end, Kṛṣṇa's speech and the song 'My mind has now become ... the essence is the one name of Śiva' sound as a spiritual undertone after love, war, and kingship. The final Sanskrit benedictory stanza and the hymn to the Goddess transform theatrical sentiment from a political proclamation of victory into a feeling of collective welfare. In the historical tradition this tranquillity is not merely a decorative epilogue; it is a religious and communal action marking the end of performance.

14. Language, Dialogue, and the Sanskrit-Maithili Relationship

The play's linguistic structure is layered. Through Sanskrit verses characters acquire an elevated register for formal identification, lineage, divine dignity, and blessings. Maithili dialogue conveys emotional proximity and rapid action, while Maithili songs provide extended expression of love, devotion, descriptions of the city, longing, and erotic feeling. This division of functions is a distinctive use of conventional poetic languages.

It would be contrary to the context to divide Sanskrit and Maithili into a rigid polarity of high and low. Sanskrit provides formal identification, but the play's principal emotional actions take place in Maithili. This is important for literary history: in a courtly drama Maithili is not merely the subordinate language of humour or folk song but a powerful vehicle for the central experience of love and for poetic structure.

The editor finds the brief exchanges well suited to acting, while also acknowledging the absence of any exceptional 'literary marvel' in the dialogue. The critical judgement is valid only in part. The dialogue does indeed repeatedly use formulae of action, but in the embodied setting of drama those formulae control movement across the stage—for instance, from 'the first corner' to 'the second corner'. An absence of verbal ornament does not imply an absence of dramatic purpose.

Older Maithili forms, Sanskrit-derived vocabulary, regional patterns, and editorial interventions in printing coexist in this text. Future linguistic research should compare the manuscript evidence with statistical inventories of word forms, sentence structures, verb endings, forms of address, Devanagari transcription, and possible instances of contact with Nepal Bhasa. To impose present-day standardised Maithili grammar upon the base edition and mark older forms as 'errors' would constitute irresponsible textual editing.

15. Invocation, Sūtradhāra, Naṭī, Entrance Songs, and the Manner of Conclusion

The first voice of the drama invokes Naṭeśvara, Gaṇeśa, and the Goddess. At this opening the performers ask the deities for well-being and place the play within sacred and artistic time. To cut the *nāndī* as though it were only an announcement preceding the modern action would rupture a fundamental conventional principle of its theatre. Even a selected portion of the invocation could effectively begin an abridged production.

The Sūtradhāra and Naṭī do more than 'start the story': they display the genesis of performance. The royal command, dramatic subject, assumption of costumes, and actors' transformation into characters occur before the audience. Rather than concealing its artifice, the theatre makes that artifice part of the process of aesthetic enjoyment. In the vocabulary of modern dramatic theory, such self-conscious performance might be described as a 'disclosure of theatrical form'; this is a comparative interpretation, not the direct imposition of a modern term upon an old text.

Entrance songs identify characters in both scenic and social terms. The distinction between the royal-divine splendour of Kṛṣṇa's party and the demonic-royal grandeur of Vajranābha's side acquires visual form through verbal expression and entrance rhythms. When additional characters return, group singing may have reminded the audience of their names, relationships, and functions. As the songs furnish narrative identification, so costume and bodily expression should reinforce it.

The sequence at the end—coronation, the return to Dvārakā, worship of the Goddess, the tranquil sentiment, and the benedictory Sanskrit verse—is not pointless repetition. It is a multilayered resolution: the killing of the demon restores the political order, marriage restores familial order, and devotion to God restores the moral order of the world. The genuine dramatic conclusion thus does not fall upon 'the enemy has been killed', but upon the renewed declaration of 'the welfare of the world'.

16. The Geography of the Stage: Corners, Entrances, Exits, and Scenes

The expressions 'in the first corner' and 'in the second corner' recur in the text. They make it clear that a distinction of scenic places could be achieved not only by changing decoration but by using different directions of the playing area. Actors end an exchange in one corner and mark a new place in another. This is an efficient way of conveying a wide narrative geography with minimal equipment.

Court, lake, garden, private chamber, hermitage, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's forest, battlefield, and Dvārakā all appear within a single play. Building elaborate realistic scenery for each place would arrest its movement. A conventional symbolic stage, the

direction of the gaze, entrance songs, and transitions between corners may have offered a practical solution to this geographic expanse. The original text points towards such a solution; determining its precise historical form requires separate archaeological evidence.

The editor proposes the possibility of performance in an open environment. This should be treated as a scholarly interpretation of his time, not as an independently documented account of every production. Corner directions could serve equally well in an open square or a palace courtyard. The evidence does not justify a more definite architectural claim.

The fundamental means of changing scene is verbal economy. A character announces that the party should now go to a particular place, another agrees, and a new scene begins. A brief instrumental signal, a gradual change of lighting, or a recurring sung phrase could usefully mark these transitions in contemporary theatre. The change of a realistic curtain is not a central requirement.

17. Acting, Bodily Language, Transformation, and Costume

Four principal styles of performance can be distinguished: formal courtly acting, intimate acting in scenes of love, the performance of a disguised troupe, and collective bodily action in the battle. If all four employ the same naturalistic physical vocabulary, the play's distinct levels will become confused. The formal procedures of introducing royal characters, the inclined postures of confidential conversation with a companion, and the overt theatricality of the internal Rāmāyaṇa require different visual grammars.

The bird forms of Haṃsa and Haṃsī present a theatrical challenge. Heavy, realistically bird-shaped masks could obstruct facial expression and singing. Instead, slight signs of wings, patterned movements of the hands, costume colours, and collective shadow-work could suggest their celestial avian identity. This is a contemporary proposal; the surviving printed text supplies no conclusive proof of the costumes used in the original period.

Several possibilities exist for the transformation into a bee: a small puppet, a revolving circle of light, a wing-shaped figure formed by the actors' hands, or a symbolic shape suggested through song. The best choice will allow spectators to grasp both the marvel of transformation and Pradyumna's clandestine entry. Excessive mechanical spectacle could destroy the delicacy of *śṛṅgāra*.

Little direct evidence survives concerning the battle scenes on the historical stage. A modern production should use controlled combat patterns, rhythmic footsteps, percussive instrumental strokes, collective sound, and divisions of light. Real weapons, uncontrolled running, or dangerous collisions are not requirements of theatrical authenticity. Preserving the ethical momentum of the battle and the relationships within the company matters more.

Costume should certainly distinguish Kṛṣṇa's side from Vajranābha's, but the mechanical aesthetic equation 'demon = ugly' ought to be avoided. Vajranābha is

himself a king who appreciates art; his court should possess cultivated splendour. Enmity may be communicated equally through conduct, policy, and the intensity of music. Such a treatment sharpens the drama's irony of kingship.

18. Religion, Mythology, and Political Legitimacy

The fundamental impetus of the plot is the suffering of the gods and the power of the demon king. The divine campaign achieves its objective through a romantic relationship followed by warfare. In this configuration religion and politics are not separate domains: even the gods must employ dynastic marriage and armed force in the pursuit of justice. This is the logic of mythological drama.

The gods face an obstacle in Vajranābha's court, while Kṛṣṇa's party is assumed to defend *dharma*. Yet the inclusion of a secret union and deception raises a serious ethical question: how far are disguises and trickery permissible in pursuit of a just end? Convention legitimises these means through the notion of divine *līlā*, or play. Criticism may acknowledge their narrative ingenuity while also marking the structure of the moral exception.

Pradyumna's coronation after Vajranābha's defeat closes the vacancy in power. Thus the private resolution of love becomes a reorganisation of political rule. To read the play as a straightforward story of acquiring a woman merely from the ordinary meaning of *haraṇa* in the title would be reductive: the text brings together consent in the secret meeting, a divine intention, and a new distribution of sovereign authority. The title's implications of power still demand examination: whose desire is central, and whose intervention makes the outcome possible? These questions place the drama in conversation with modern criticism.

The religious register is not uniformly Vaiṣṇava. The invocation addresses Śiva, Gaṇeśa, and the Goddess; Kṛṣṇa's divine exploits occupy the middle; the end invokes Śiva's name and offers praise to Bhagavatī. A plurality of devotional traditions establishes poetic connections here. It should not be reduced to a manifesto of religious syncretism; it represents the combined presence of auspicious performance practice, a local devotional world, and the poet's mythological aesthetic sense.

Royal panegyric is an indispensable historical indication at the play's beginning. However mythological the main story may be, the prefatory praise of the king constructs an ideal image of contemporary sovereignty. The formulas of destroying enemies, *dharma*, peace, and the welfare of king and people echo one another. There is, however, no firm evidence for establishing a direct historical identity between the fictional King Vajranābha and the author's reigning contemporary. Any analogy must be described as symbolic, not as a claim about events.

19. Poetic Achievements and Dramatic Limitations

The first achievement of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* is that it does not separate *rasa*, rāga, and dramatic action. Words become songs, songs constitute scenes, and scenes bring about changes in the minds of characters. The Rāmāyaṇa performance embedded within the play confers a self-conscious aesthetic complexity upon its predominantly musical form.

Its second achievement is the movement of characters through multiple spaces. The realm of the gods, Dvārakā, the demon's city, the lake, gardens, inner apartments, hermitage, and battlefield all belong to its extensive geography. Songs and the organisation of stage corners carry the narrative between them. This demonstrates that traditional theatrical technique could construct a large world without dependence upon realistic stage decoration.

A third achievement is the inward agency of the relationship between Prabhāvatī and Haṃsī. Haṃsī's eloquence makes events possible, changes in Prabhāvatī's desire supply the emotional logic of union, and the many emotional situations associated with women's companionship prevent the play from becoming merely a war between gods and demons.

Its formal limitations are nevertheless plain. Ceremonial introductions consume considerable time; some exchanges are highly formulaic; the social choices available to women remain bounded by marriage; the human grief of Vajranābha's side is hardly expressed after his death; and the final divine resolution closes ethical questions too quickly. To identify these features is not to depreciate the composition, but to fulfil the demands of a comprehensive criticism.

Lekhanātha Miśra's assessment that the play offers 'the marvel of music rather than of theatricality' is partly consistent with the evidence, given the exceptional prominence of song. But to treat it as the last word would obscure the bee transformation, the troupe's internal drama, the multi-corner stage, and the design of secret entry. According to the present review, song and acting do not compete; they depend upon each other, although they are not equally developed.

20. Engagement with Recent Scholarship: Agreements and Disagreements

Rāmadeva Jhā's monograph of 1990 examines Jagatprakāśa Malla's poetry and drama, the courtly background, and procedures of performance at length. Its treatment of dramatic prologues, entrances, division of acts by days, and auspicious concluding conventions is particularly useful. This allows the three acts of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* to be viewed as three days of performance; the actual expressions 'Now on the second day' and 'Now on the third day' support the interpretation. Yet without independent performance records we cannot assert with certainty that every historical staging lasted exactly three days.

Rāmāvatāra Yādava's research demonstrates the multilingual transmission of the Maithili poetic tradition through the Newar-script manuscript of Jagatprakāśa's *bārahamāsā* compositions. Reading the songs of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* within this comparative setting clarifies the links between the language of women's separation, authorial signatures, musical forms, and the wider tradition of lyric verses. This does not mean that every characteristic of the *bārahamāsā* form occurs in every song of separation in the play: the comparison concerns themes and styles.

Makoto Kitada's 2026 research illuminates the expression of intimate affection and grief for Candraśekharasiṃha in Jagatprakāśa Malla's poetry. This enlarges the older practice of treating the author's name in a song merely as a royal signature: a *bhaṇitā* may also be a site of personal memory and inner feeling. But to project themes of later mourning directly upon this *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, dated 1656, would be a chronological mistake. New research can make our reading more sensitive; it must not rewrite the original text.

Carol C. Davis's history of Nepalese theatre (2019) provides a method for reading theatrical traditions in relation to broad social and political transformations. The available account of this work offers a context for the cultural significance of the Malla period, but such a brief external reference cannot answer every question about the performance of this particular drama. The present review accordingly gives decisive priority to the original text.

Three scholarly points of agreement thus emerge: Jagatprakāśa Malla's connection with Maithili and Nepal Bhasa literature, the predominance of music in Malla-era drama, and the tradition of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*'s three acts. The principal open questions concern the variants of the base manuscript, the form of its earliest actual performances, its specific melodies, the personal authorship of individual songs, and the relationships among separate manuscripts. Answers require renewed examination of archival originals, not merely introductory information available on the web.

21. A Framework for Contemporary Production and Directorial Commentary

This chapter does not claim to reconstruct the play's historical first performance; it offers practical proposals for modern theatre inspired by indications in the surviving text. Two forms are possible: an extended festival production respecting the original three-day structure, or a selective one-evening production preserving the story and its principal songs. They require different degrees of textual editing. The first should emphasise the completeness of songs and ritual rhythms; the second, a selection of songs essential to the action.

21.1 Playing Space: One Stable Base, Many Imagined Locations

The stage could be divided into a centre, left corner, right corner, and raised section. A central circular space would represent the lake or assembly hall; the

two corners could mark meeting places in Dvārakā and Vajrapura; the elevated platform could signify the divine assembly or royal throne. Metal frames, flower garlands, cloth hangings, a small royal seat, and musical instruments would be enough to carry the action through numerous spaces. This simplicity should be understood not as 'impoverished decoration' but as an aesthetic decision informed by the source's system of corners.

Musicians and actors could appear together at the invocation. The Sūtradhāra and Naṭī could assign roles in front of the audience, followed by a small scene of taking on costumes. The stage would appear to come into being before our eyes. During the play within the play, the principal company could step outside their first character identities to create a second level of acting. Actors playing members of the demon king's assembly would sit as spectators on stage, watched in turn by the real audience. This arrangement would clarify the internal drama's theatrical irony.

21.2 Four Distinct Rhythms of Performance

The first rhythm, 'invocation', would be formal, slow, and centred on the group. The second, 'love before union', would rely upon restrained glances, short pauses, moderate movement, and solo song. The third, 'the art of disguise', would be lively, with visible transformations, the actors' exuberance, and theatrical illusion. The fourth, 'conflict and resolution', would use fast bodily patterns and ensemble sound before settling into tranquillity. Without this differentiation, the emotional journey of the three acts would become one extended musical recitation on a single level.

If Haṃsī is played as excessively childlike or buffoonish, her political intelligence disappears. She uses speech to gain entry among the king, the princess, and Kṛṣṇa's side. Her movements should be light, facial expression alert, and emotional changes incisive. The bodily pauses within Prabhāvatī's songs should suggest both her desire and her fear; Vajranābha's commands should reveal splendour and insecurity simultaneously.

21.3 The Handling of Music

Because the original melodies are unavailable, a contemporary composer should create new tunes with respect for the rāga designations and state clearly in the programme that these are reconstructed stage melodies. The division between refrain and stanza should be made audible to spectators. Instrumental music must not overwhelm the voices: it should remain restrained beneath dialogue, while serving as an independent theatrical signal for entrances, transformations, battle, and benediction.

Where a succession of solos becomes lengthy, nonverbal physical action should continue between them. During a lakeside song, for instance, Haṃsī's movement, Prabhāvatī's gaze, the symbolic ripples of water, and a companion's uncertainty could produce visual change. Music would thus not freeze the story but extend its experienced duration.

21.4 'Dance the Rāmāyaṇa': Specific Directions for the Internal Play

A second, smaller circle could be marked out for the internal drama, within which the troupe assumes the roles of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, Vibhāṇḍaka, and Lomapāda from within its own costumes. Vajranābha and his courtiers would remain spectators on stage. The portrayal of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's innocence and the courtesans' political obligation should retain their ethical complexity; simplistic mockery and the objectification of women's bodies should be avoided. Deception, the interests of the state, and the innocent ascetic's position form the dramatic heart of the episode.

Changes of role could be made openly before the audience's eyes: a shawl produces the sage, a change of upper garment the king, a shift of rhythm the arrival of the courtesans' troupe. This transparent theatricality reveals the play's underlying idea of defeating royal power through acting itself.

21.5 The Bee's Entrance and Secret Love

For the flower-garland episode, a garland could hang within a circle of light. The actor playing Pradyumna would disappear briefly, then reach the garland through a small bird-shaped puppet or a symbolic bee movement. On Haṃsī's signal he could slowly recover his visible human body. The music at that moment should be extremely delicate: after the miracle, the audience ought to feel the hesitation of the actual lover.

The secret meeting succeeds in the original story. In modern acting, the heroine's consent and personal desire should be made unmistakable; this would not change the plot but clarify the choice already present in her dialogue. The danger of entering a forbidden place should remain, but the scene of love should not be transformed into one of fear or coercion.

21.6 Battle, Coronation, and Peace

Vajranābha's death could be represented through symbolic ensemble movement. Encirclement, percussive rhythm, and changes in the group's direction would be the principal means of constructing conflict. A brief silence after the death is essential if victory is not to become mere noise. For the coronation, an elevated throne, crown, or token of royal investiture would suffice.

During the final invocation of Śiva's name, hymn to the Goddess, and *bharatavākya*, the whole company from the opening invocation could return to form a single circle on stage. This recurrence would link the journey through three acts to its original communal ritual. Spectators would feel that the love, deception, warfare, and political change they have witnessed have been gathered into the theatrical community's final wish for universal welfare.

22. An Indexed Inventory of Textual Evidence

This inventory organises the editorial evidence and the three acts' principal events by subject and narrative order. It presents evidence of publication and editing first, followed in sequence by the theatrical episodes of the three performance days, from the invocation to the final benediction.

Evidence 1: Suniti Kumar Chatterji's letter of 27 September 1972, a document of scholarly encouragement.

Evidence 2: The title page, editor's identification, first edition of 1972, reprint of 2013, and statement accompanying the reprint.

Evidence 3: The manuscript, date, evidence of authorship, and the editor's expressly stated doubts, as presented in the editorial introduction.

Evidence 4: The synopsis of the three acts given in the editorial introduction.

Evidence 5: The editorial introduction's count of seventy-five songs, its discussions of stage space and rāga names, and its assessment of the predominance of poetry.

Evidence 6: The policy of conversion and letter-decipherment adopted in the editorial work.

Evidence 7: The *nāndī*, Sūtradhāra and Naṭī, description of the king, and announcement of the play.

Evidence 8: Kṛṣṇa's party, Indra, Haṃsa and Haṃsī, Vajranābha's family, and the lake.

Evidence 9: The beginning of the second day, Prabhāvatī's encounter with Haṃsī, and *pūrvarāga*.

Evidence 10: The summoning of the actors' troupe and preparation for the royal expedition.

Evidence 11: The command 'Dance the Rāmāyaṇa' and the internal drama of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga.

Evidence 12: The bee form, flower garland, Prabhāvatī-Pradyumna meeting, and ending of the second act.

Evidence 13: The third day, conversation among the women companions, and the marriages of Candrāvatī and Guṇavatī.

Evidence 14: The Kaśyapa episode, garden, royal court, and growing tension.

Evidence 15: The disclosure of the secret, battle, Vajranābha's death, and coronation.

Evidence 16: The return to Dvārakā, Śiva's name, hymn to the Goddess, *bharatavākya*, and final colophon.

Evidence 17: The index of songs and the index of verses.

Evidence 18: The bibliography of supporting works used by the editor.

23. Outstanding Research Questions and a Programme for Future Editing

The first task in the next phase of research on *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* should be to identify the surviving original manuscript at the National Archives, verify its current catalogue number and ownership/access arrangements, and obtain high-quality images. Lekhanātha Miśra's description of the manuscript in 1972 is an important historical clue; without a current collection catalogue or direct examination of the archive, its exact present location cannot be asserted with complete confidence.

The second task is a side-by-side collation of a letter-for-letter manuscript transcription, the 1972 text, and the 2013 reprint. Where the choice is between *ra/la* or *ba/va*, the reason for each reading should be recorded. Word division in songs, punctuation, Newar-script stage directions, and editorial regularisation of Sanskrit verses should appear in textual notes. Some differences may concern transcription alone; others may change the meaning.

Third, a musical catalogue should be prepared. For every song it should record its opening line, character, rāga designation, refrain, expressed emotion, narrative function, and the state of any melody available today. Musicians, palaeographers, and scholars of Maithili literature should work together; documentary evidence is required before any modern rendition is called the historical original melody.

Fourth, comparative history should examine the composition of 1656 in relation to the political circumstances of the Malla court. Royal descriptions, character introductions, court festivals, and symbols of coronation may be compared with contemporary records, but facts should not be exceeded by treating mythic characters as one-to-one allegorical equivalents of contemporary kings or rivals.

Fifth is the history of performance. Expressions such as 'in the first corner'/'in the second corner', the troupe's transformations, acts distributed over several days, the forms of songs, and a possibly open playing space raise important questions about earlier theatre. Future research should repeatedly distinguish claims that the text itself supports from those requiring separate performance evidence.

Sixth is a comparative study of dramatic texts. A comparative table of prologues, acts, entrance songs, signatures, song-rāga relations, and *bharatavākya* should be constructed across Jagatprakāśa's other plays, the dramatic tradition of Jagajjyoti Malla, Maithili Kīrtaniyā theatre, plays in Nepal Bhasa, and Sanskrit mythological drama. Its object should not be to determine the direction of influence beforehand, but to test influence, coexistence, and difference through actual textual evidence.

Seventh, the drama's portrayal of women's lives needs to be read afresh. Research should address patriarchy, women's desire, the language of companions, secret marriage, and gendered positions within royal authority. Such scholarship will

ask modern questions, but it must also do justice to the characters' historical situation. A statement that does not occur in the original must not be attributed to it.

24. Concluding Critical Judgement

The principal strength of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* resides in its combination of musical beauty and narrative inventiveness. The ingenious mediation of Haṃsa and Haṃsī, the bee's entry into forbidden inner apartments, the troupe's performance of the Rāmāyaṇa in an enemy court, the sequence unfolding across several days, and the final devotional conclusion distinguish it from a mere retelling of mythology. In this sense, the text is a historical laboratory of Maithili musical theatre.

It would be wrong to reject the play as 'slow-moving' when judged by the standards of modern dialogue-driven theatre. It would be equally wrong to exempt it from all criticism in the name of history. Extended character introductions, formulaic exchanges, the marriage-centred destinies of women, the moral simplicity of battle, and the defeated side's limited individuality are genuine constraints. A review becomes more credible by acknowledging them alongside the work's poetic achievements.

Lekhanātha Miśra's great editorial contribution was to make an old Maithili drama from a Newar-script manuscript record available to modern readers. His introduction establishes the basis for discussing theatre, songs, rāgas, chronology, and textual procedures. At the same time, his openly stated doubts and acknowledged interventions point the way towards a future critical edition. Scholarly respect does not require treating his conclusions as infallible; it requires pursuing reasoned research beyond the evidence he assembled.

The most important lesson for modern theatrical practice is that song and acting are not rivals. Bodily action continues within song, the feeling of a lyric spreads through performance, and music preserves the story's memory during changes of scene. If a theatre company understands this interdependence and constructs a production while preserving the original text's essential scenic locations, *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* can become a living theatrical experience for contemporary spectators rather than a historical relic.

The ultimate literary judgement can be stated thus: the play's highest achievement lies not only in the delicacy of its love songs but in the power of performance that makes love possible; its internal contradiction lies in the tension between independent desire and the royal-divine destiny to which desire is attached; and its historical significance lies in providing tangible textual evidence of the wide theatrical life of medieval Maithili. To read *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* is to hear poetry, see acting, understand power, and interrogate the history of manuscripts at the same time.

Part Two: Close Criticism through Original Songs, Dialogue, and Scenes

25. Close Reading of the Original Text and the Method of Criticism

Part One offered an overall account of the drama's history, plot, characters, music, and scenic design. This second part now provides a sequential close reading of its songs, dialogue, and scenes, from the *nāndī* to the *bharatavākya*. The base is the printed text edited by Dr Lekhanātha Miśra in 1972 and its reprint of 2013. This study has not directly examined the original Newar-script manuscript. The forms of words in the printed edition must therefore not be equated with possible readings of the original manuscript. Where the text is doubtful, it should not be altered arbitrarily without independent manuscript evidence.

In this close reading, stanza divisions, indications of speakers, rāga names, signs of refrains, divisions of acts, stage directions, and editorial notes are treated as integral to dramatic meaning. A song becomes intelligible in relation to the dialogue before and after it, a character's entrance, and movement on stage. The song and verse indexes are also useful to textual analysis. An interpretation of quoted lines is not a replacement for the whole song; it is a critical examination of a particular episode.

Quotations are read in association with the relevant act and scene. To understand the sung rhythm of a song, the speeches immediately preceding and following it, its environment, the entrances of characters, and its refrain marks are also considered. Every interpretation is thereby attached to a definite group of scenes.

A number of short passages from songs and dialogue in this part are kept close to the wording of the original printed text. Rather than supplying conjectural emendations of doubtful expressions, the textual difficulty itself is made a subject of interpretation. Modernising old Maithili spelling in the name of standardisation may affect both historical rhythm and dramatic meaning. The relationship between oral singing traditions and the edited printed text must likewise be considered.

26. The Nāndī and the Opening of the Play: Gods, Artists, and Audience

Original invocation song

Oṃ namaḥ śrīnaṭeśvarāya.

Nāndī song — Gauḍī:

> First remember Lord Gaṇeśa, the revered guide;
> grant the boon of fearlessness, and dispel distress.
> Holding trident, drum, and jewelled garland,
> let loving contemplation rest upon Śiva.
> With Nandī and Bhṛṅgī he ever sports;
> beautiful is the tiger skin worn by the Lord.
> The moon marks his brow; pure Gaṅgā flows through his matted hair;

> the Lord of the three worlds wears serpents as ornaments.
> May you dwell in my mind, in my innermost thought;
> King Jagatprakāśa sings in delight.

Dramatic purpose of the invocation

After praise of Gaṇeśa come recollections of Śiva's drum and trident, Nandī and Bhṛṅgī, his matted hair, and the Gaṅgā. In the closing authorial signature the poet-king's name connects worship of the deity with the courtly performance.

The opening establishes the invocation of Gaṇeśa and Naṭeśvara, Sanskrit stanzas, and the entrance of the Sūtradhāra. Its poetic significance is not exhausted by asking divine favour: theatre begins its work within a triangle of deity, king, and spectators. An initial declaration such as 'First the Sūtradhāra enters' is the theatre's own introduction of itself. Characters do not spring unannounced into their fictional world; they enter according to the discipline of performance.

The movement from sacred invocation towards the praise of kingship is politically meaningful as well. Once the auspicious protection of the gods has been sought, the public legitimacy of the king is displayed. Royal eulogy and mythological narrative are brought together before the spectators. It would be inadequate to confine this activity to a narrow modern definition of propaganda, for royal patronage and religious ceremony were productive structures of medieval public art. Nevertheless, the critical question remains: at what point does poetic praise become a perspective controlled by power?

Some lines of the *nāndī* have older phonetic forms and printed spellings different from modern usage. Its rāga indication and its separate marking of Sanskrit passages as 'verses' provide important evidence for reconstructing the order of performance.

A theatrical proposal follows: before the principal characters enter, the Sūtradhāra and Naṭī might remain within a pool of light before the audience while the invocation is sung. There is no necessity to interrupt the song to construct realistic images of a deity or king. Collective singing, rhythm, and simple entrance signals bring the performative character of the text into clearer view. This is a suggestion for modern production, not an authenticated direction of 1656.

27. From Prologue to Royal Panegyric: An Architecture of Language and Kingship

The opening episodes of the prologue contain a sequence of Maithili songs and brief dialogue between Sūtradhāra and Naṭī after formulaic Sanskrit descriptions. The volume of singing and brevity of speech reveal that the drama assigns different tasks to 'declaration' and 'performance'. Sanskrit royal description functions as proclamation, while Maithili lines produce the rhythm of the king's prowess, the people's welfare, and public beauty. As a result, the linguistic

hierarchy is not linear: formal metres are in Sanskrit, but the audible life of the drama is in Maithili.

It is important to notice here the initial sequential use of 'first corner', 'second corner', and 'entrance'. If the different corners denote different scenic places, an actor's position can take the place of an elaborate architectural set. The royal court's richness may be created through the actors' posture and the verbal architecture of song rather than an abundance of objects. Compared with the vast decorated stages of modern productions, this principle of minimal equipment is more economical.

The editor's introduction to the first edition raises possibilities concerning authorship, the manuscript, and staging, but the *bhaṇitā* alone cannot establish whose hand composed the poetic language of the printed prologue. Criticism of the royal panegyric therefore concerns the ideology of the work, not an indisputable diagnosis of a single poet's state of mind. Historical writing requires evidentiary discipline at this level.

28. The Early Presence of Haṃsa and Haṃsī: Acting as Messengers and Control of the Plot

In the latter part of Act One, the conversations among Indra, Haṃsa and Haṃsī, Kṛṣṇa's party, and Vajranābha's court become interlinked. In divine conflict, weapons do not act first: ingenious dialogue, movement between places, and invitations to perform precede them. Brief utterances such as 'Come', 'Speak', and 'Enter' make the plot move in practical terms; they are not extended monologues expressing the hero's inner life, but links directing theatrical procedure.

Haṃsī's theatrical capacity operates on three levels: she receives the gods' message, reaches the demon king's court, and prepares the secret route to a future union. A female messenger is not merely an attendant; she is a mobile agent traversing uncertain spaces. Thus her avian form, though a natural image, acquires social and political meaning. Her speech finds a way through the very gates of the inner apartments that are closed to the young woman herself.

The male-and-female pair Haṃsa-Haṃsī brings a suggestion of *adbhuta rasa*, the sentiment of wonder, into the poetic beginning. Two small birds determine the direction of a narrative crowded with large groups. In dramaturgical terms this may be considered an example of 'a protagonist's course controlled by another character'. Making Haṃsī excessively comic in modern production would destroy her strategic intelligence and the connections she establishes between scenes.

29. The Dawn Song of Act Two: The Dramatic Transformation of Time

Opening dialogue and dawn song of the second performance day

Now, on the second day.

Kṛṣṇa: O Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā! Take a moment's rest.

Rukmiṇī: Satyabhāmā! Enter.

Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā: Lord, command us.

(Rāma turi mā). Vibhāsa — entrance:

> O beautiful one, bow: the sun has arisen. [Refrain]
> From the minds of the ruddy sheldrake and its mate, grief has gone far away.
> It is morning; the sleeping world has not yet fully awakened.

Kṛṣṇa: Beloved, it is morning. Have Pradyumna, Gada, and Sāmba not arrived?

Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā: They are almost here.

The beginning of the second act contains a song of daybreak; the sign of sunrise suffuses the scene with light. At this moment the passage of time is created not by an elaborate scene change but by the sound of a song. The allusion to the sheldrake pair, the ending of night, and the suggestion of separation from the beloved link the beginning of the day to the expectation of love. 'Morning' is therefore not merely temporal information but an emotional prelude set against the lovelessness of night.

In its artistic structure the song bridges the divine strategy of Act One and the psychological intimacy of Act Two. The facts of the plot could continue if it were omitted, but the experience of time, the bird imagery, and the symbolic preparation for the coming lakeside conversation would be weakened. It is inappropriate to deem the song 'unnecessary' without identifying these emotional functions.

The passage cannot automatically be interpreted through the prescribed ascending and descending notes of a modern classical rāga. Its rāga name is a historical marker; reconstruction of the melody is the task of a present-day musician. At the start of Act Two, bright instrumental sonorities, hints of bird calls, and gentle movement could convey the song's transformation of time. The dialogue before and after it also establishes the emotional setting of the new phase of the story.

30. Prabhāvatī and Haṃsī at the Lake: The Formation of Desire through Questions

The meeting of Prabhāvatī and Haṃsī: original dialogue and song

Prabhāvatī: O Haṃsī! I see someone extraordinary here. Who are you?

Haṃsī: Young lady, I am Haṃsī, come here from the heavenly world. Who are you? Whose daughter?

Prabhāvatī: Haṃsī, I am Prabhāvatī, daughter of the demon Vajranābha.

Haṃsī: Prabhāvatī, listen to my words.

Prabhāvatī: Very well, speak.

Gauḍī — Sāraṅga — entrance:

> Listen, fair lady, to something I have to say:
> without a husband there can be no delight in love. [Refrain]
> You are of youthful age, yet have no beloved.

Haṃsī: Prabhāvatī, your beauty and youth are wasted without a husband.

Prabhāvatī: Haṃsī, listen.

Haṃsī: Speak, Prabhāvatī.

Emotional transition in the dialogue

This movement from an opening question about identity to advice about marriage forms the basis of Prabhāvatī's developing desire. After introducing herself, Haṃsī raises the question of a lack in the heroine's life; the dialogue advances in anticipation of the response.

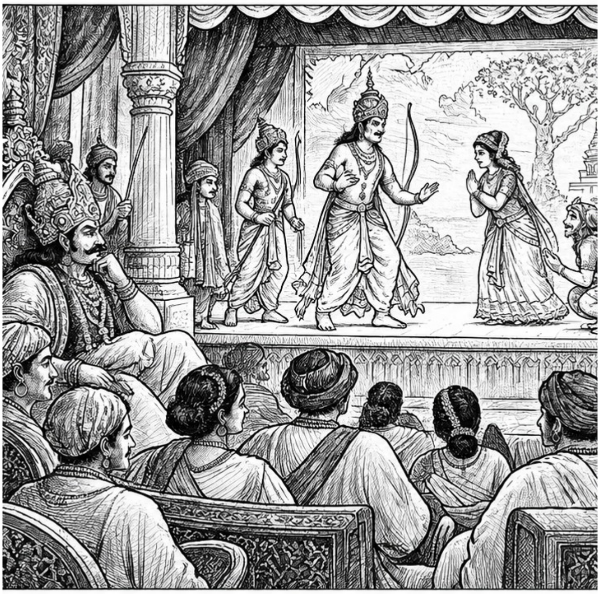
The lakeside conversation is central to recognising the heroine's voice. Prabhāvatī asks questions, Haṃsī identifies herself as a messenger, and discussion of a suitable bridegroom opens the hero's story. One unmistakable sentence begins with the address 'O Haṃsī!' Desire does not descend as a miracle already complete within the heroine: it takes shape through companionship, information, and awareness of her family's opposition.

In the extended song of separation in this scene, Prabhāvatī asks Haṃsī about the longing to see her beloved, the fear of separation, and means of fulfilling her desire. Although the song's lines are long, they do not produce 'emotional stasis'; they initiate the next stage of interaction. After the song Haṃsī proposes a plan. Song should therefore be understood not as an excess beyond dialogue but as its inward impulse. It gives a voice to the mind's insistence, after which strategy becomes active.

A sharp ethical question arises here: Prabhāvatī's own desire and her father's hostility become opposing elements in the same relationship. A production should allow both the fear of her father and her attraction towards her beloved. There is no need to depict the heroine either as an inert icon of devotion or as an entirely modern self-willed individual. It is harder, but truer, to act her self-determination within the social limits of a historical character.

A particular textual caution concerns older forms and spelling variants in the song at the lake. Rather than conjecturally correcting them according to modern spelling, the original forms, metre, refrain, and scenic context must be read together. Altering such forms without independent manuscript evidence would not be textually responsible.

31. Bhadra's Rāmāyaṇa: The Double Voice of a Play within the Play



The royal theatre: performers before the watching court

The internal Rāmāyaṇa: dialogues involving the king, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, and Vibhāṇḍaka

King: O Kāmakalā and the other three! Go to the hermitage, deceive Vibhāṇḍaka's son Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, and bring him here.

The women: Your Majesty, as you command.

Kāmakalā: Kāmakeli, Ratikalā, Ratikelī! By the king's order we must beguile Ṛṣyaśṛṅga through the pleasures of love and bring him here.

Second woman: Kāmakalā, you speak well; let us go.

King: Minister, until Ṛṣyaśṛṅga arrives, let us remain in the inner apartments.

Minister: Your Majesty, enter.

Vibhāṇḍaka: My son Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, continue your penance here. I am going into the forest to gather fuel-sticks.

Ṛṣyaśṛṅga: Father, as you command.

A later conversation at Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's hermitage

Ṛṣyaśṛṅga: Father, do not cast away those extraordinary fruits, those lovely eyes and sweetness. [The printed wording is difficult.]

Vibhāṇḍaka: Son, do not trust them; they are all illusory demons.

Ṛṣyaśṛṅga: Father, as you command.

Vibhāṇḍaka: Son, continue your penance. I am going to a sacred bathing place for my midday ablutions.

Ṛṣyaśṛṅga: Father, as you command.

Kāmakalā: Friends, call the sweetmeats fruit and the wine sacred water; offer them to him.

Second woman: Kāmakalā, enter.

The women: Son of the sage, eat the fruits and roots of our hermitage and drink this sacred water. Here, take them.

Ṛṣyaśṛṅga: Ascetics, where do such extraordinary fruits and such extraordinary water grow?

The women: Son of the sage, such a river flows by our hermitage and such trees bear fruit there. Do not delay; come.

Ṛṣyaśṛṅga: Friends, very well.

Relation between the internal drama and the main plot

The invitation to leave Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's hermitage gives visible form to dramatic deception and attraction. In the principal action of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, too, characters change locations through disguise and clandestine entry. Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's performance thus becomes an echo of the main design of love.

The fame of the actor troupe in the demon's city, permission to perform, and the enactment of the Rāmāyaṇa episode acquire importance in sequence. This is the most self-conscious theatrical invention in the whole drama. Within the plot the performers are actually actors, but their role also forms part of a plan to win an enemy's trust. The audience knows that the troupe belongs to Kṛṣṇa's strategy, while Vajranābha's court, enchanted by performance, cannot perceive this duality.

To regard 'Dance the Rāmāyaṇa' simply as incidental entertainment would miss its work in the action. Here art itself is diplomacy. The infiltration needed for espionage in political reality becomes possible through theatrical entrance. The troupe's artistry opens a gate of social authority; at the conceptual level, performative power secretly defeats royal power.

The Rāmāyaṇa inside the drama, and the war of Kṛṣṇa's lineage against Vajranābha in the surrounding action, bring two mythological worlds together on one stage. In a modern sense this convergence could be called 'rewriting', but it would be wrong to present that term as sole proof of the original author's intention. The historical popularity of Rāmāyaṇa performance and the royal spectators' aesthetic pleasure are both present in the work.

Two cultural levels should be made distinct on stage. Initially, the performers of the outer play should appear in their ordinary roles; as the internal drama begins, costume, gait, rhythm, melodic opening, or the limits of the playing area should clearly change. After the internal performance, the actors should visibly recover

their identities as Bhadra's troupe. The clearer this difference, the more apparent will be the king's mistake and Kṛṣṇa's side's ingenuity.

32. The Flower Garland and the Bee: The Rhythm of Transformation

Flower garland and bee: a visual metaphor for concealed entrance

After the internal drama of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga has ended, the plot returns to Pradyumna's clandestine mission. This transition establishes a clear sequence of events between the troupe's public spectacle and the intimate entrance involving flower garland and bee.

Following Bhadra's performance, Pradyumna's planned entry and approach to Prabhāvatī become a theatrical marvel. The shape of the bee, the flower garland, the flowers' proximity to a woman's body, and the prohibited inner chamber are joined in one scenic image. The beauty of the metaphor is not a decorative flourish after the story; it provides a means of crossing a socially guarded threshold around the body.

Flowers are a conventional stimulant of love, but their material status matters especially here. The hero who gains access to a forbidden inner apartment by way of a garland is not merely a lover; he is also an actor making an unexpected indirect journey. The bee image constructs a simultaneous opposition of 'free flight' and 'closeness to the body'. Attraction and the risk of secrecy converge in one sign.

Narratively, this is more an account of entry in disguise than of violent abduction. The word *haraṇa* in the title should be criticised in relation to the character's consent and the stages of the secret assignation. Instead of staging it

as a man's conquest of a woman's body, a contemporary production could reinforce the perspective of the female messenger and heroine. That would be a modern directorial elaboration, however, not an established assertion of the dramatist's intention.

The recurrent 'corners' of the original drama constitute the basic grammar of scenic movement even in this marvellous episode. One corner is the public royal world, another the sphere of private encounter; a great change of environment occurs with minimal scenery. In a single rotation an actor may pass from royal assembly to flower garden and then to inner apartment. A design of this kind would follow the indications of the original text.

33. The Emotional Dialogue of Prabhāvatī and Pradyumna: The Duality of the Poet's Signature

The songs of union at the secret meeting establish a close relationship between lyric poetry and drama. The song initially speaks from a point near the character's private joy, but the signature of the royal poet inevitably enters the later lines. 'Prabhāvatī's feelings' and 'Jagatprakāśa's vocal imprint' are interwoven in the same poetic language.

The expectations of modern dialogue-centred dramatic reading fail here, because as soon as a song is taken to be a direct psychological monologue by a character, the poet's signature appears out of place. In a classical musical drama it should be heard at two levels: the character's emotional and aesthetic situation, and the public poetic convention of the court poet. This may be called the 'double voice'. The poetic line opens towards the audience and listeners rather than remaining confined to the characters alone.

If actor-singers deliver every signature as an ordinary piece of dialogue, the effect may be awkward. Instead, a subtle shift of melodic elaboration, lighting, or ensemble singing at the signature could create a moment of poetic 'looking outward'. Unnecessary gestures should not, however, be added in contradiction of the printed directions. Decisions about musical practice should rest upon both evidence and the poetic exchange.

34. Candrāvatī and Guṇavatī at the End of Act Two: A Collective Song of Lack

The final song and entrance dialogue of the second act

Barāṛī — entrance:

> We shall go, distressed, to Prabhāvatī's dwelling. [Refrain]
> We are helpless women, and so are you;
> no woman bereft of a husband finds honour or beauty.

(In the first corner)

Candrāvatī: Guṇavatī! Let us go to Prabhāvatī's dwelling.

Guṇavatī: Candrāvatī! Enter.

(In the second corner)

Guṇavatī: Candrāvatī! Come quickly.

Candrāvatī: Guṇavatī! Come.

Both: Sister, we offer our salutations.

Prabhāvatī: May you find husbands of your choosing.

Prabhāvatī: Sisters, come here in your sorrow.

Both: Sister, enter.

End of Act Two.

The song of Candrāvatī and Guṇavatī at the close of the second act deserves particular attention. Its explicit line, 'Without a husband, no helpless woman finds beauty', discloses the density of social expectation. After the story has shown the success of one union, this song establishes the other women's experience of deprivation. Prabhāvatī's fulfilled love is not automatically taken to provide happiness for everyone; in the shadow behind her joy stand the unsupported desires of two companions.

A critic should consider *abalā* ('helpless woman') at three levels: as the speakers' self-designation within the song, as a social image of women's lives made dependent upon marriage, and as a shared voice among the female characters. To cut the song off from consideration and reject it entirely on the basis of modern ideas of justice would be too easy a response. Conversely, to treat *abalā* as an eternal truth about womanhood would conceal the text's ideological limit. The precise conclusion is that women's wishes are voiced, but their social recognition is imagined through the relationship to a husband.

If the scene is staged as a duet, the two characters should retain distinct voices. A restrained delivery by Candrāvatī and a restless one by Guṇavatī, for example, would reveal two desires within the same words. This is a new theatrical proposal; the source does not prescribe such a distinction of delivery.

35. The Question of Act Three: From Secret Love to Public Crisis

Opening dialogue and song of the companions on the third performance day

Now, on the third day.

Prabhāvatī: Sisters, rest for a little while.

Both: Sister, enter.

(Prabhāvatī falls asleep.)

Candrāvatī: Guṇavatī, Prabhāvatī's behaviour has changed. Some man has entered here.

Guṇavatī: Candrāvatī, you speak truly. Let us go and make our request too.

Candrāvatī: Enter.

Both: Prabhāvatī, listen to our concern.

Prabhāvatī: Candrāvatī, Guṇavatī! Speak.

Dhuriyā Mallāla — co:

> I am an unfortunate woman; you are blessed. [Refrain]
> I have seen something different in your conduct;
> I know from your weary body what its meaning is.
> Who has filled this vessel of yours?
> Who has drunk nectar from your lips?

The dramatic transition of Act Three

Immediately after the collective song of deprivation at the end of Act Two, the companions in Act Three observe Prabhāvatī's changed condition. Their earlier longing now turns into questioning, suspicion, and the possibility of discovering a secret relationship.

At the beginning of Act Three the consequences of the secret union begin to emerge. The companions become curious on seeing Prabhāvatī's bodily language and conduct. Short exchanges intensify dramatic suspicion. In contrast to the extended songs of separation that formerly slowed movement, terse questions and answers now increase the momentum of disclosure.

The private relationship's consequences become a public problem of the royal court. Prabhāvatī's secret love and her father Vajranābha's dynastic prestige come into conflict within one social field. This transition turns on three agents: recognition by the companions, information conveyed by the queen, and the king's anger. The romance becomes a crisis of socialisation because the royal household claims authority over private bodily relationships.

To call Premavatī's disclosure simply a villain's betrayal diminishes the text's complexity. She also conveys court discipline, parental authority, and the royal family's social standing. Nevertheless, criticism must ask how the exercise of such authority affects the heroine's safety.

36. The Three Couples: Symmetry and Inequality of Desire

Early in Act Three, the proposal to arrange marriages for Prabhāvatī's companions, Candrāvatī and Guṇavatī, enlarges the story. The pairing of Gada and Sāmba with the principal hero Pradyumna turns the action from 'the success of one romance' towards 'a dynastic settlement for a group'. This symmetrical arrangement is poetic: two additional romances echo the central love.

Yet the characters' voices are unequal within this symmetry. Prabhāvatī's love before union, conversations with the messenger, and secret assignation receive fuller development; the desires of her companions move more swiftly towards resolution. Their marriages consequently do not receive the psychological extent granted to the main romance. Before calling this a fault of authorship, the brevity of plotting characteristic of musical drama should be remembered; nevertheless, it remains a critical limitation.

In ensemble acting, giving all three couples precisely identical physical postures may be visually attractive but would reduce their differences as characters. Instead, hesitation in the first couple, conversational quickness in the second, and a formal determination in the third could be expressed through distinct bodily rhythms.

37. Kaśyapa, Vajranābha, and Royal Duty: The Hermitage as a Voice of Resistance

The encounter of king and sage at Kaśyapa's hermitage, political ambition, and counsel concerning right conduct unfold the play's political meaning. Within the preordained conflict of gods and demons, Kaśyapa's hermitage provides an 'alternative space of justice'. The unreflective desire of kingship is thus measured against ascetic standards. The episode's dramatic function is not simply to foreshadow war but to show the linguistic difference between power and restraint.

If the king believes his authority all-powerful, the actors' layered performances, the gods' plan, and the hermitage's blessing each place limits upon his unrestrained desire. The theatrical disguise has already crossed his threshold, news of love is spreading through his household, and the hermitage questions the royal design. Here power is weakened from within before external warfare begins.

In a production, the intensity of instruments could be lowered and expressive silences lengthened in Kaśyapa's presence. This would bring out the distinction between courtly words of command and the restrained replies of the hermitage. It is not an instruction in the original text, but a scenic proposal arising from criticism of the episode's poetry.

38. Battle, Death, and Coronation: The Narrative's Ethical Dilemma

Once the secret relationship is revealed, the story accelerates towards battle and coronation. The demon's anger, the protection afforded by Kṛṣṇa's side, the result of the fighting, and Pradyumna's accession follow a single moral line. Within the divine strategy justice is assured; the outcome therefore creates little surprise, and the depiction of events becomes the principal source of dramatic feeling. Unlike the drawn-out love before union sustained by songs, battle can occur through brief rhythmic cycles and declarations.

Criticism faces a complex question: why should the hero be crowned after the enemy's death? If the romantic union were merely a private matter, why would it require a transfer of political power? The answer is that the story seeks an institutional resolution to the struggle of gods and demons. Recognition of the marriage, a new dispensation of sovereignty, and religious legitimacy belong to the same conclusion.

Yet the play does not extensively question the defeated side's grief, the people's uncertainty, or the political costs of transition. Contemporary criticism may

record these absences. The text's historical dramatic aim, however, is heroic victory followed by collective benediction; to impose the expectations of modern tragedy directly upon it would be a methodological error.

Safe symbolic weapons, opposing patterns of ensemble movement, stamping rhythms, and the arc of lighting would serve a battle scene well. Real violence or hazardous attempts to fall on stage do not increase authenticity. The foremost skill of theatre lies in establishing the conflict's ethical tension in the spectator's imagination.

39. Śiva's Name, Bhagavatī, and the Bharatavākya: A Many-Formed Auspicious Conclusion

Hymn to Śiva, closing dialogue, and benedictory verse

Gauḍī-Pañcama — *co*:

> My mind has come to this understanding. [Refrain]
> I have understood the expanse of the world; its essence is only Śiva's name.
> The Lord bears the waters of the Gaṅgā upon his head; service to him has no price.
> Who would hesitate to serve Śiva's feet? I shall serve him here.
> King Prakāśa says: O Lord, fulfil the desires of my heart.

Kṛṣṇa: Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā, the path of devotion to God is the essence.

Both: Lord, it is true.

Kṛṣṇa: Now that the gods' work is done, what remains to be accomplished?

Pradyumna and the others: Everything intended has been fulfilled; let it be so henceforth.

(A Sanskrit verse spoken by Pradyumna)

> May Vāsava send rain at the proper season; may the earth abound in grain and crops;
> may the king be ever victorious, master over the enemies of the Yādavas.
> So long as the Gaṅgā remains in the matted hair of Śiva,
> may the fame of the heroic King Jagatprakāśa, brilliant with poetry, grow and flourish.

All: May every undertaking succeed.

Pradyumna: People, worship the Goddess.

All: Enter.

Quoted lines from the final hymn to Bhagavatī

> Show your compassion, Mother of the world.
> You, Bhavānī, are the sustainer of all people.
> I am your lowly servant; Goddess, show mercy.
> Mother, how could I recount all your virtues?
> King Jagatprakāśa makes this supplication:
> let my mind remain at your feet, birth after birth.

The sequence of the final scenes makes it clear that the story does not end simply with a celebration of victory. Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā stand before Kṛṣṇa, Pradyumna enters a new familial position, and the song of Śiva's name, the Sanskrit benedictory stanza, and the hymn to the Goddess follow in succession. The expression 'the essence is only Śiva's name' marks a transition from the outward fervour of war to inward spiritual practice.

Although the divine party in the play belongs to Kṛṣṇa's lineage, the invocation of Śiva and Bhagavatī at the conclusion indicates the many forms of devotional practice of the period. This should not be presented as a conclusive modern sociological doctrine of 'complete syncretism'; the auspicious conventions of musical theatre could invoke several deities. What the text establishes firmly is that the final sequence is not a uniformly sectarian declaration.

At the end, a line such as 'Show compassion, Mother of the world' appears together with the royal signature. The private story of Prabhāvatī gradually becomes an auspicious invocation of the 'Mother of the world'. The communal benediction at the beginning and the public welfare desired at the end echo one another. The primary meaning of the sung conclusion is the dedication of the story's final success to the well-being of its spectators.

A note for production: the battle should not be followed simply by a blaze of light ending in a victory shout. Bringing characters into a common line, transferring the royal insignia formally, and gradually allowing collective singing of invocations to Śiva, the Goddess, and universal welfare would keep the multilayered close alive. Instead of inserting conjectural words in place of difficult passages, the dignity of the original language and sound should be respected.

40. Standards of Textual Editing: What Does 'Correct' Mean?

Two distinct editorial tasks lie ahead. The first is the comparative examination of the printed editions of 1972 and 2013; the second is the creation of a new critical text by collating the original Newar-script manuscript, other available copies, and the printed editions. Only independent examination of letter variants, word division, rāga indications, and textual readings can establish a firm basis for such an edition. The present study offers literary and theatrical interpretation on the basis of the accessible printed text.

Applying the grammar of modern 'correct Maithili' unchanged to the drama's older dialogue would alter its historical sound forms. Old verbal inflections, rare Sanskritisms, divisions of poetic lines, refrain marks, rāga names, and directions such as 'first corner' can all tempt an editor to make the text easier to read. But the linguistic evidence of the original quotations would thereby be lost. Critical prose may be written in present-day Maithili, while the historical word forms of the quoted older lines should be preserved as far as possible.

Future letter-by-letter editing should prepare seven elements for each song: 'reading of the original manuscript', 'literal Devanagari transcription', 'note on

textual doubt', 'manuscript variants', 'explanation of meaning', 'evidence for the rāga', and 'function in the scene'. A letter that merely seems incorrect should not be changed without an independent manuscript or an authenticated variant. To represent an editor's conjecture as the original poet's utterance would be a scholarly ethical failure.

The 'original rāga name' and a 'melody performed today' belong to different categories of evidence. A letter-for-letter transcription of song words does not automatically yield musical notation. Reconstructing historical rhythms, instruments, pronunciation, and spectators' emotional idiom requires independent study of archives, related rāga indexes, and oral traditions.

The final judgement is that the true literary power of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* lies not in its mythological plot alone, but in the dramatic conversation among language, songs, short exchanges, the actors' disguises, women's desire, and royal authority. Reading the original songs, the contexts of dialogue, and the indications of acting together reveals the work's significance for both literature and theatre.

Additional References: Engagement with Newer Research

Rāmadeva Jhā's *Jagatprakāśamalla* (Sahitya Akademi, 1990) restores the king's life and poetic dramas to the history of Maithili literature. Particular attention is necessary because new models of national literature often connect literary works to state frontiers, while Malla-period Maithili writing was fundamentally a practice across places. Manuscript archives in Nepal and the linguistic history of Maithili must therefore be read together.

Horst Brinkhaus examines the transition from Bengali to Maithili in Malla-period dramas and the relatively brief form of their spoken dialogue. His criticism emphasises song and actor-singers, but this does not justify passing the same judgement on the poetic achievements of all such plays. The internal drama, messenger, and finely arranged bee disguise of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* have their own independent creative value.

Makoto Kitada's research of 2026 explores intimate affection, bereavement for a friend, and the intricate context of emotional songs in Jagatprakāśa's Maithili and Nepal Bhasa writings. It undermines the simplification that a royal poet's literature is only an instrument of royal panegyric. Nevertheless, private grief from a different work must not be projected without evidence into the minds of Prabhāvatī or Pradyumna. Comparative insight is useful where a specific textual resemblance can be established.

Rāmāvatāra Yādava's manuscript research illuminates the importance of variant readings to the study of older Maithili songs. By the same method, establishing a reliable text of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*'s songs cannot consist merely of copying printed Devanagari: it must compare manuscript letters, sung refrains, and the reading of words that have been separated in transmission. The present review

has used the available printed edition to examine literary meaning and theatrical practice.

Brief references: (1) Jagatprakāśa Malla, *Prabhāvatīharaṇa Nāṭaka*, edited by Lekhanātha Miśra, 1972/2013; (2) Rāmadeva Jhā, *Jagatprakāśamalla*, Sahitya Akademi, 1990; (3) Horst Brinkhaus, 'On the Transition from Bengali to Maithili in the Nepalese Dramas of the 16th and 17th Centuries', 2003; (4) Rāmāvatāra Yādava, research on a Maithili *bārahamāsā* manuscript, lecture of 2015; (5) Makoto Kitada, 'Jagatprakasha Malla's Grief for His Bosom Friend', *Asian Ethnology* 85(1), 2026. The evidence of the play itself and the arguments of outside research are kept distinct throughout this volume.

Appendix A. Narrative and Scenic Map of the Three Performance Days

Day One: Introduction, Divine Purpose, and the Demon King's Court

Scene-group one: *nāndī*, Sūtradhāra and Naṭī, announcement of the play, and description of the king. Function: establishing the festival setting and the conditions of performance.

Scene-group two: formal entrances of Kṛṣṇa, Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā, and the characters of Kṛṣṇa's party. Function: identifying the divine family and its members.

Scene-group three: the plan involving Indra, Jayanta, Haṃsa, and Haṃsī. Function: revealing the future political objective of love.

Scene-group four: Vajranābha, the queen, the daughter, other royal family members, and the court. Function: presenting the opposing household and its setting.

Scene-group five: the arrival of Haṃsa and Haṃsī at the lake and Vajranābha's curiosity. Function: preparing the encounters and meetings of the second day.

Day Two: The Female Messenger, Love Before Union, the Actors' Disguise, and the Meeting

Scene-group six: Kṛṣṇa's reappearance and the campaign of the Dvārakā faction. Function: setting the divine plan in motion.

Scene-group seven: the lakeside dialogue of Prabhāvatī and Haṃsī. Function: the heroine's choice, the obstruction posed by opposition, and longing.

Scene-group eight: the announcement of Bhadra's troupe before Vajranābha. Function: opening a path through the palace's security.

Scene-group nine: 'Dance the Rāmāyaṇa' by Bhadra's troupe—the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga episode. Function: the art of disguise and the king's deception by spectacle.

Scene-group ten: the flower garland, the bee form, and entry into the inner apartments. Function: the secret meeting of lovers.

Scene-group eleven: the emotional dialogue of Prabhāvatī and Pradyumna, and the arrival of Candrāvatī and Guṇavatī. Function: preparing the next crisis of secrecy.

Day Three: Other Couples, the Rājasūya, Disclosure, Battle, and Resolution

Scene-group twelve: dialogue among companions and the arrangement of the three couples. Function: the social extension of love.

Scene-group thirteen: Kaśyapa's hermitage and Vajranābha's desire for kingship. Function: the context of royal duty and pride.

Scene-group fourteen: the queen's information, the demon king's anger, and encirclement. Function: transition from secrecy to open conflict.

Scene-group fifteen: the intervention of Kṛṣṇa's party, battle, and Vajranābha's death. Function: divine victory.

Scene-group sixteen: Pradyumna's coronation, return to Dvārakā, introduction of the wives, song of peace, and *bharatavākya*. Function: complete resolution of family, sovereignty, and religion.

Methodological qualification: The 'scene-groups' above are analytical divisions, not the original work's editorial numbering of every scene or a mandatory sequence of manuscript scene numbers. The source contains numerous directions such as *lu*. Episodes have been grouped here to make the overall narrative movement intelligible.

Appendix B. A Practical Guide to Staging

Invocation: auspicious songs to Gaṇeśa, Śiva, and the Goddess; restrained ensemble singing; gradually reduce the distance between actors and audience.

Royal description: regal movement, an elevated seat, expanding light; distinguish the historical royal panegyric from the mythological narrative.

Haṃsa and Haṃsī: twofold bodily rhythm, verbal ingenuity, symbolic ripples of lake water.

Prabhāvatī's love before union: solo voice, few instruments, meaningful pauses of the gaze, natural inwardness.

Bhadra the actor: openly declared acting, changes of costume, reactions of courtly spectators; keep the boundary between the main drama and internal play clear.

Bee and flower garland: a subtle marvel in minimal light, followed by the human intimacy of the lovers' meeting.

Candrāvatī and Guṇavatī: distinct emotional personalities in a duet; individual differences within a shared destiny.

Vajranābha and Kaśyapa: bodily contrast between royal power and ascetic ethics; stillness and distance.

The queen's disclosure: a shift from softly voiced tension towards a forceful military rhythm.

Battle: safe theatrical combat, sound, shadow, and coordinated movement; no unnecessary realistic violence.

Coronation: a raised seat and the symbolism of a ceremonial band; movement from the tumult of war to peace.

Bharatavākya: the whole company present together; an emotional bridge to the audience at the close.

Appendix C. Summary of Evidentiary Distinctions and Disagreements

Established evidence: The base edition's title page; the first edition of 1972 and reprint of 2013; indications of three performance days; the song index; the presence of rāga names; the internal Rāmāyaṇa drama; the bee's entry on the flower garland; battle; and *bharatavākya*. These have direct support in the text.

Editorial propositions: The total of seventy-five songs, the drama's predominant poetic character, the conception of an open playing area, doubts about the manuscript's authorship, and editorial changes to particular letters. These rest upon Lekhanātha Miśra's introduction. Some are counts that can be checked; others are critical judgements or conjectures.

Evidence from outside scholarship: Rāmadeva Jhā's study of Malla dramatic forms; Rāmāvatāra Yādava's study of a Maithili *bārahamāsā* manuscript; Makoto Kitada's 2026 study of Jagatprakāśa's personal bereavement; and modern research into Nepalese theatrical history. These provide comparative contexts beyond the play itself.

Open questions: Complete variant readings of the manuscripts; actual dates of performance; historical melodies of specific rāgas; a verifiable stage plan for the use of corners; the social composition of the troupe and audience; and possible collaboration in authorship. The available documents do not answer these questions conclusively.

Appendix D. Bibliography

1. **Primary source.** Jagatprakāśa Malla. *Prabhāvatīharaṇa Nāṭaka*. Edited by Dr Lekhanātha Miśra. First edition 1972; reprint 2013. The three-act dramatic text with the *Viṣaya-Praveśa*, index of songs, index of verses, and bibliography.

2. Rāmadeva Jhā. *Jagatprakāśamalla. Makers of Indian Literature* series. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1990. Digital copy: https://sahitya-akademi.gov.in/publications/pdf/jagat-prakash-mall_maithili.pdf.

Particular relevance: Malla-period literary work, composition of the plays, prologues, performance days, entrance songs, and concluding conventions.

3. Rāmāvatāra Yādava. 'A Hitherto Undiscovered and Unstudied Newari Manuscript of a Maithili Bārahamāsā Song by King Jagatprakāśamalla of Bhaktapur: A Preliminary Analysis.' *Conference Proceedings 2015: The Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal and the Himalaya*. Kathmandu: Social Science Baha / Himal Books, published 2019. https://soscbaha.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/conference-proceedings-2015.pdf. Particular relevance: multilingual manuscripts, Maithili songs, and Jagatprakāśa's poetic tradition.

4. Makoto Kitada. 'Jagatprakasha Malla's Grief for His Bosom Friend: Affection Expressed in Maithili and Newari.' *Asian Ethnology* 85, no. 1 (2026). https://asianethnology.org/article/164477-jagatprakasha-malla-s-grief-for-his-bosom-friend-affection-expressed-in-maithili-and-newari. Particular relevance: Jagatprakāśa's affection, bereavement for a friend, authorial signatures, and poetic expression in Maithili and Nepal Bhasa.

5. Carol C. Davis. *Theatre of Nepal and the People Who Make It*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/theatre-of-nepal-and-the-people-who-make-it/C0517BABF6A159F588A556E9CAAD56D4. Particular relevance: the broad social history of theatre from the Malla period to modern Nepal. This review makes only limited background reference to the publisher's available description, not detailed claims based on a direct reading of the whole book.

6. Kathryn B. Hansen. *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India*. Available in the University of California Press digital collection: https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/public/book/grounds-for-play-the-nautanki-theatre-of-north-india.html. Particular relevance: comparative indications concerning Malla-period manuscripts, North Indian musical drama, and mixed theatrical languages. *Nautanki* and *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* are not treated as belonging to one directly identical tradition.

7. Sudip Kumar Jha. *Maithili Naach: A Need for Redrawing the Boundary*. Tribhuvan University research archive, 2008. https://elibrary.tucl.edu.np/items/41253398-0c3d-4a39-b344-dc95c6f5b1b9. Particular relevance: the need to bring the folk-theatrical tradition of Maithili *nāca* into the centre of critical inquiry; not cited as proof of the original drama's particular history of performance.

8. Bibliography in Lekhanātha Miśra's base edition. It lists the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *Abhinayadarpaṇa*, works on Sanskrit drama, the history of Nepal, Vidyāpati, Jyotirīśvara, and earlier research into Maithili literature. The list provides evidence of the historical source-world used by the editor; the present review does not claim independently to have read in full every work mentioned in that bibliography.

End of the critical study. The present examination is based upon Jagatprakāśa Malla's drama, its printed edition by Lekhanātha Miśra, and the cited critical scholarship. Further research is needed into the original melodies of older rāgas, all manuscript variants, and the historical particulars of early theatrical performances.

Appendix E. The Original Songs and the Concordance of Seventy-Five Entries in the Song Index

Editorial state of the text: The song index in the original printed play has seventy-five opening-line entries. Some entries are different lines of the same song, as with entries 38 and 48. Here the sung texts are arranged in the order of the drama, and every index entry is identified.

This working transcription is based on comparing the original printed text with preliminary letter recognition. Not every letter has undergone independent verification against the manuscript. Text enclosed in ⟦...⟧ in the source is uncertain or incomplete. Older Maithili forms have not been automatically modernised in the name of correction. This document should not be regarded as a fully letter-for-letter authenticated critical edition.

Original Songs in the Order of the Three Performance Days

Song Index 25 — Victory, O Mother; Grant Well-being

Victory, victory, Mother; grant us well-being.
Gods and mortals alike meditate at your feet.
Mother, you bear weapons and missiles of many kinds;
you alone bestow the gift of fearlessness.

Song Index 52 — First Remember Lord Gaṇeśa

First remember Lord Gaṇeśa, the revered guide;
grant the boon of fearlessness and dispel distress.
Holding trident, drum, and jewelled garland,
let loving contemplation rest upon Śiva.
With Nandī and Bhṛṅgī he ever sports;
beautiful is the tiger skin worn by the Lord.
The moon marks his brow; pure Gaṅgā flows through his matted hair;
the Lord of three worlds wears serpents as ornaments.
May you dwell in my mind, in my innermost thought;
King Jagatprakāśa sings in delight.

Song Index 60 — The Sun Unfolds the Lotus of the Solar Dynasty

The sun that makes the lotus of the solar lineage bloom
has risen, O king, illuminating the world.
The darkness of evil men has fled far away;
righteous action and good works have greatly increased.
The people rejoice; no one suffers sorrow;
let the rainclouds pour down their rain.
Some speak of Rāma, others of Kāma;
for some, the mind is a dwelling cool as snow.
Beloved of Candrāvatī, lord of Padmāvatī,
his glory has filled every horizon.
Vaṃśamaṇi speaks, considering the essence in his mind:
I offer myself to the king, an incarnation of Karṇa.

Song Index 7 — The Excellent Country Named Bhaktapur

There is an excellent land called Bhaktapur;
all who behold it find it delightful.
The primordial Mother dwells there;
all people have placed their hopes in her.
The people here are worthy of reverence, of noble stock;
the country is adorned like Indra's city.
King Jagatprakāśa thus proclaims:
I know no refuge but Caṇḍī's feet.

Song Index 49 — Dressed in Yellow, Four Beautiful Arms

Clad in yellow, with four graceful arms,
he bears conch, discus, mace, and lotus.
He entered with his sons and wives;
he granted freedom from fear and drove distress away.
King Jagatprakāśa sings this too:
my mind finds its devotion at Viṣṇu's feet.

Song Index 74 — I Shall Be Kandarpa and You Shall Be Prabhāvatī

I shall be Kandarpa; you shall be Prabhāvatī;
what adornments have been prepared for the two of us? [Refrain]
Many accomplished people will remain gathered here;
let this delight the hearts of everyone.

Song Index 4 — I Am Delighted; We Shall Go Beneath the Kadamba

I am delighted; we shall go beneath the kadamba tree
and look upon the garden. [Refrain]

Song Index 1 — Extraordinary Beauty, Your Moonlike Face

Extraordinary beauty, your face is the moon;
seeing it has awakened joy within me.
Fair one, act in such a way
that all may be freed from the affliction of desire.
Smile and show me your true affection;
my heart can ask for nothing greater.
Jagatprakāśa says, O proud one,
do not wound with your pride the one you call your husband.

Song Index 39 — Your Lotus-like Eyes, Beautiful as Lotus Petals

Your eyes, my lord, are beautiful as lotus petals;
your appearance rivals the god of love.
Hear me: I have no other thought, no other refuge;
my life wastes away in longing for my beloved.
Without you, fair one, I have no judgement or worldly skill;
I know nothing of the colours of amorous pleasure.
Hearing your sweet words, ⟦śrayalahu?⟧ in your house,
rejoice and drink the honey of love.
Hearing your voice, today became an auspicious day;
I have obtained the sight of you.
Many sorrows have been taken away; destiny has given me joy;
I join my hands at the feet of ⟦premov?⟧.
The poet sings in delight of this sentiment:
Prakāśa Malla, prince and king.
Without service to the Goddess nothing is attained;
my heart understands this at her feet.
Listen, passionate beloved! [Refrain]

Song Index 45 — Indra, Lord of All the Gods

King of the gods, lord of every deity,
whatever boon is requested, the god grants.
With the crown upon his head he entered;
seeing the stage he was delighted.
He looked splendid with Jayanta and Haṃsī;
longing arose for the city of Amarāvatī.
King Jagatprakāśa thus sings;
he fixes his attention at the feet of the enemy of Kāma.

Song Index 23 — Go Quickly, Jayanta, to Amarāvatī

Go quickly, Jayanta, to Amarāvatī. [Refrain]
The demon Vajranābha has caused us all much sorrow.
Send Haṃsī with all possible care;
tell her how his life may be brought to an end.

Song Index 44 — I Received the Boon Given by the Grandfather

I obtained a boon granted by the Grandfather;
through its strength I conquered the three worlds.
A demon named Vajranābha arose;
he gave delight to all his own followers.
Through my power the gods and sages have grown dejected;
who else can be compared with me?
Jagatprakāśa sings in delight;
the minds of discerning people rejoice exceedingly.

Song Index 21 — Come, Let Us Go to Our Assembly

Come, let us go to our assembly;
I have inflicted many sufferings upon all the immortals.

Song Index 26 — I Shall See the Assembly of the Demon King

I shall go to see the demon king's assembly;
I shall enter and carry out Vāsava's task.
I shall go at once. [Refrain]

Song Index 42 — See the Beauty of This Lake

Look at the beauty of this lake;
my mind longs to see the two of them play.
A pair of ruddy sheldrakes plays among lotus leaves;
at the sight, desire awakens in my mind.
Pure and full of abundant sweetness,
it is surrounded by cool, fragrant breezes.
All these things I have entrusted to you;
at the sight of your beauty, my pride has vanished.

Song Index 10 — From Where Have You Come to This Lake?

From where have you come to this lake,
Haṃsī and Haṃsa, together? [Refrain]
Why have you come into my kingdom?
Tell me what business brings you here. [*Mebhāsā* indication]

Song Index 34 — I Longed to See Your City

I came with the desire to see your city;
that is the purpose that brought me here. [Refrain]
Let me see this Vajrapura of yours;
fulfil the hope within my heart. [*Mebhāsā* indication]

Song Index 51 — Bow, Fair One; the Sun Has Arisen

Bow, beautiful one: the sun has risen. [Refrain]
From the ruddy sheldrake and its mate, grief has gone far away;
it is dawn, but the sleeping people have not yet arrived.

Song Index 22 — Come, Friend; Let Us Go to the Garden

Come, friend, let us both go to the garden. [Refrain]
You and I shall see the beauty of the grove;
my heart is drawn there.
I long to look upon the lotus-filled wood,
where bees move among the water lotuses.

Song Index 66 — Listen, Fair Lady, to Something I Must Say

Listen, fair lady, to what I have to say:
without a husband there is no delight in love. [Refrain]
You are young in years, yet have no beloved.

Song Index 70 — Listen to One Request of Mine

Listen to one request of mine;
I am a young woman and do not know this story. [Refrain]
I have been kept in this city under these conditions;
reveal a way for me, O messenger.

Song Index 32 — He Is My Father's Enemy; This Is Not Right

He is my father's enemy; this is not fitting.
Consider what is right and prudent.

Song Index 35 — Hearing Your Words Will Bring Ruin

Hearing what you say will bring destruction;
yet I have placed my hope in you.

Song Index 43 — Think Carefully about Kṛṣṇa's Son

You have seen Kṛṣṇa's son; consider him carefully.
Let him become my chosen one.

Song Index 55 — Do Not Entertain Doubt Today

Do not harbour doubt in your mind today;
this will prove the best course.

Song Index 64 — Hear My Story, O Messenger

Listen to my story, O messenger;
I cannot endure life without my beloved. [Refrain, addressed to a friend]
The fire of separation burns my body;
this pain is no small suffering.
Without my love, I feel near to death;
O messenger, save my life.
I have placed my hope in you alone;
now I shall become your servant.
King Prakāśa says: hear her, O messenger,
and devise the means of bringing her to her beloved.

Song Index 18 — I Shall Go Forth

I shall go forth. [Refrain]
I shall take an extraordinary account to my father's assembly;
I shall tell this story today.

Song Index 11 — Tell the Extraordinary Tale, Haṃsī

Tell us, Haṃsī, the extraordinary story. [Refrain]
You have seen many lands of many kinds;
what you have seen enchants everyone. [*Mebhāsā* indication]

Song Index 19 — Come, Come, Let Us Go

Come, come, let us go. [Refrain]
Let us hasten to Dāmodara,
and bring Pradyumna back as an actor.

Song Index 40 — No Equal to Him in the Three Worlds

There is no equal to him in the three worlds. [Refrain]
I have seen an actor named Bhadra;
in virtue and appearance he surpasses everyone. [*Mebhāsā* indication]

Song Index 29 — Come, All of You, to My Assembly

Come, everyone, into my assembly. [Refrain]
Do not delay, all of you;
who could see this assembly and remain unmoved?

Song Index 63 — Vāsava Has Sent Me to You

Vāsava has sent me to your presence;
listen, listen to my petition. [Refrain]
The demon king formerly caused the gods suffering;
now destroy the enemy dear to the gods. [*Mebhāsā* indication]

Song Index 3 — O God, Help Me through Your Own Son

O god, assist me with your own son;
let Haṃsī go quickly, without delay. [Refrain]
Let all your sons depart disguised as actors;
remove the sorrows of the many gods. [*Mebhāsā* indication]

Song Index 30 — Let Us Go to Śṛṅgārapura

Let us go to Śṛṅgārapura; it is not far from here.
Let us make the play of love together today.

Song Index 31 — Youth Lasts Only Four Days

Youth endures but four days;
beautiful woman, relieve the burning of desire.
Your lips are like *bimba* fruit, your body delicate;
though without fault, I am wounded by Love's flower-bow.
Carry me across the earth of this pain;
do not slay your lover ⟦śṛṅgāraṃ śravadhāri?⟧.
King Jagatprakāśa sings of this sentiment;
those who know *rasa* will find delight in it.

Song Indexes 38 and 48 — Lord, Hear One Petition / Apart from My Beloved I Have No Refuge

Lord, listen to one request;
apart from my beloved I have no other refuge.

Tell me, lord, to whom do you belong but me? [Refrain]
Your body, accomplished lover, is tender;
what can I say of your youth?
As a woman I am dependent upon you;
love me as water and fish belong together.
Thus speaks King Jagatprakāśa:
[[madhurab?]] the two were fashioned in union.

Song Index 48 — Apart from My Beloved I Have No Refuge

This opening line forms part of the sung passage listed under index entry 38 ('Lord, hear one petition'). The text has not been repeated.

Song Index 53 — The Great Sage Has Performed Penance Today

The great royal sage has undertaken penance today;
conversation with all these people fills me with fear.
My hope rests in you. [Refrain]
He seeks to carry out his king's business;
turn your arrows of glances upon everyone today.
As they acted, the sage was delighted;
by this stratagem they brought him under our power.
King Jagatprakāśa, lord of the earth, sings:
this sage knows nothing of the feeling of love.

Song Index 71 — Blessed Are We to Have Seen You

By good fortune we have obtained the sight of you;
at the touch of your body our sins departed.
The sage's tender body is like the śirīṣa flower;
O royal sage, you fulfil our hopes.
Come to our hermitage and serve Hari;
with abundant fruits and roots we shall honour this deity.

Song Index 27 — I Shall Visit Your Hermitage

I shall go and see your hermitage;
the touch of your body has cooled me.
Whatever you people say, I shall do;
why have these extraordinary fruits been kept here?

Song Index 12 — Why This Delay?

Why this delay, why this delay?
Do not linger; come, come to my hermitage;
there, fix your thought upon Hari;
there, meditate upon Viṣṇu. [Refrain]

Song Index 69 — I Shall Go to the Painted House

I shall go to the pictured dwelling. [Refrain]
The house is not far from here;
slowly, slowly I shall make my way home.

Song Index 57 — Mālatī, Mādhavī, Damana, and Bakula

Mālatī, mādhavī, damana, and bakula flowers:
I shall take them all to the demon's city.

I shall see the beauty of that city. [Refrain]
I shall place the flowers near Prabhāvatī;
my heart's desire will then be fulfilled.

Song Index 14 — What Has Happened to My Life?

What has happened to my life? I have no composure. [Refrain]
I saw the end of day; the other king arose;
how shall I endure today?
A bee sang in a beautiful melody;
its feeling assumed a lovely form.
Those two together have stolen my life;
my existence has fallen into danger.
Listen, Haṃsī, to a little request:
what will become of me?
King Prakāśa sings this sentiment;
my mind rests at the Goddess's feet.

Song Index 50 — I Have Fulfilled Indra's Task

I have fulfilled Indra's task;
I shall depart today. [Refrain]
Prabhāvatī has been married, and the fair one's course is settled;
day by day the two grow of one mind.

Song Index 62 — A Lotus Face, Eyes Like Wagtails

A face like a lotus, eyes like wagtails:
fair one, you have stolen my heart.
Your twin breasts resemble the self-manifest Great Lord;
I came to this country for the sake of seeing you.
Your teeth are most beautiful pearls;
how can I describe their radiance?
You know the emotions and pleasures of love;
there is no beauty like you in another land.
Thus speaks King Jagatprakāśa:
Guṇavatī is a remarkably discerning and accomplished lady.

Song Index 8 — My Beloved, How Beautiful You Are

My beloved, how beautiful you are. [Refrain]
Hear my small request, O my lord:
today all my sorrow has departed.
I have seen your lotus face, O lord;
you have granted me the sight of your beauty.
I have come to know your true form, O lord;
we two are properly united.

Song Index 28 — Let Us Both Go to Prabhāvatī's Dwelling

Let us both go to Prabhāvatī's place. [Refrain]
I am a helpless woman, and so are you;
without a husband, no helpless woman finds beauty.

Song Index 65 — Listen to the Words of Both of Us

Listen to the words of us two;
my mind is scorched by separation. [Refrain]
You have obtained a husband and found a happy way;
my life has not found its course—advise us what to do.

Song Index 72 — I Am an Unfortunate Woman

I am an unfortunate woman; you are blessed. [Refrain]
I have perceived a change in your conduct;
I understand from the languor of your body.
Who has filled the vessel of your body?
Who has drunk nectar from your lips?

Song Index 41 — The Burden of Youth for Both of You

The burden of youth rests upon you two, O women;
I have given instruction to you. [Refrain]
Set out; may your purpose be fulfilled;
arrange your attire for the beloved today.

Song Index 67 — Listen, My Friend

Listen, my friend, to my words;
I shall carry out your business for you.
I shall devise a way; do not let your mind be troubled.
You shall gain happiness, and your purpose will surely succeed.

Song Index 13 — What Has Pradyumna Said? Shall We Both Go?

What did Pradyumna say? Shall we both go together? [Refrain]
Do not delay; hurry today.
An invitation was issued: what has come of the matter?

Song Index 47 — Without a Husband a Helpless Woman Has No Beauty

Without a husband a helpless woman has no beauty;
what young woman could look upon you without desire?
The innocent woman knows nothing of love;
there is no equal to you in the three worlds.
Your sweet words are a sea of nectar;
what can I say of your wondrous face?
King Prakāśa invokes the line of Raghupati;
Gada of the Yadu lineage is full of the pleasures of love.

Song Index 59 — Doe-eyed Lady, You Are So Young

Doe-eyed beauty, you are exceedingly young;
even a mighty sage would be bewildered at the sight of you.
Your pair of breasts is like golden pitchers;
their touch would drive away distress.
Do not shoot me, beautiful one, with Love's flower-arrows;
instead grant an embrace to this stricken body.
Thus speaks Jagatprakāśa, lord of the earth:
there is no other woman equal to this one.
What can I say? [Refrain]

Song Index 5 — The Noble Sage Kaśyapa Has Come

The noble royal sage Kaśyapa has arrived;
look upon the stage and the disciple today.
I am an excellent sage. [Refrain]

Song Index 20 — Come, Sunābha, to Our Father's Presence

Come, Sunābha, let us go before our father;
beholding our father's feet removes sin.

Song Index 68 — Listen to the Song, O Woman

Listen to the composition, O lady. [Refrain]
Without renouncing you I find no beauty; I sing your praises.
The sight of your form has taken hold of my mind.
Show me affection; let me have your kisses;
listen at this moment, for my words are not in vain.

Song Index 73 — I Shall Meditate upon God

I shall meditate upon God;
apart from him I know no other. [Refrain]
Come, disciple, let us go to the forest hermitage;
Śiva's feet are my only treasure.

Song Index 17 — Guṇavatī, You Are Replete with Every Virtue

Guṇavatī, you are full of every virtue;
do not cast me away from your heart.
Your soft hands resemble new leaves;
your lovely youth displays the play of Love.
Grant me a sight of you, a moon of autumn;
at the sight of your face my heart rejoices.
Do not, dear one, do not extinguish my life;
this is the petition I place before you.
King Jagatprakāśa speaks of this young lady:
Sāmba has made her the garland of his heart.

Song Index 36 — Hearing Your Words, My Life Trembles

Hearing your words, my whole being trembles;
my lotus-like body cannot bear the weight of two.
I am very young, and you are a fine young man;
why do you show no compassion when you see me, lord?
Do not be obstinate, handsome accomplished lover;
at your touch my heart trembles.
King Jagatprakāśa sings this song;
those who are wise will savour its sentiment.

Song Index 9 — Take This Woman into Your Care

Take such a woman into your protection. [Refrain]
Seeing the fair one's face, I shall go to Sāmba;
I have made her a woman for whom you feel love's desire.

Song Index 24 — Come, Brother Sunābha, to Your Own House

Come, brother Sunābha, to your own dwelling;
my heart longs to see that house.

Song Index 15 — What Will Become of My Life?

What will become of my life?
Hearing all this, my heart trembles violently. [Refrain]
I have heard many terrible cries;
hearing them, I have become exceedingly afraid.
After hearing it all I came to you, father;
my own mother does not rescue me.
Now the lord will be killed;
I too shall stay beside my beloved.
King Jagatprakāśa sings this sentiment;
without serving Caṇḍī no refuge can be found.

Song Index 2 — Sunābha, Why Are You So Proud Before Me?

Sunābha, why show me such pride?
I shall strike you down now; do you not know me? [*Moy ke* indication]

Song Index 37 — Gada and Sāmba, Your Understanding Is Slight

Gada and Sāmba, you have little understanding;
turn back, the two of you, out of fear of me. [*Mebhāsā* indication]

Song Index 46 — Pradyumna, You Are Merely Human

Pradyumna, you are only a mortal man;
yet you have been staying happily in my city without my permission. [*Mebhāsā* indication]

Song Index 33 — I Remain Here to Kill You

I have stayed in this city to kill you;
with the power of the boon I shall take your life. [*Mebhāsā* indication]

Song Index 58 — Ghosts, Witches, Spirits, and Fiends Danced in Joy

Ghosts, witches, spirits, and fiends danced in delight. [Refrain]
They ate livers and flesh raw;
for the pleasure of devouring it, they danced.
All these creatures drink blood, as do the witches;
vultures eat hands and feet in heaps.

Song Index 61 — Vajranābha, What Business Have I with You?

Vajranābha, what have I to do with your business?
Demon, today I shall send you to Yama's abode. [*Moy ke* indication]

Song Index 75 — Śiva, Śiva, What Has Become of My Lord?

Śiva, Śiva, what has happened to my husband?
The god has taken away my jewel.
Whatever I asked, my lord granted;
now such a beloved husband has departed far away.
Separated from such a husband,

I shall destroy my body and contemplate the yogic path.
Thus sings King Jagatprakāśa;
service to Hari leads to the better abode.

Song Index 6 — I Know Pradyumna's Life Has Found Fulfilment

I know that Pradyumna's birth has achieved its purpose. [Refrain]
He has slain the demon Vajranābha, beautiful lady;
do not fear these other demons.
Come laughing now to the city of Dvārakā;
your son has won a fine reputation.

Song Index 56 — The Demon Was Slain; All the Gods Rejoiced

The demon has been slain; all the gods rejoice:
you have done an excellent deed.
As long as the sun endures, may you be lord here;
take possession of your enemy's kingdom.

Song Index 54 — My Mind Has Come to This Understanding

My mind has reached this understanding. [Refrain]
I have seen that the world's expanse is without substance;
its true essence is the one name of Śiva.
The Lord bears the stream of Gaṅgā's water upon his head;
serving him can never lead one astray.
Why hesitate to worship Śiva's feet?
I shall worship him in this place.
King Prakāśa says: you are my refuge;
fulfil the wishes of my heart.

Song Index 16 — Show Compassion, Mother of the World

Show compassion, Mother of the world;
you, Bhavānī, sustain all people.
Seeing me, your humble servant, show mercy;
Mother, how could I describe your virtues?
King Jagatprakāśa makes this request:
in birth after birth let my mind remain at your feet.

The Sanskrit Benediction at the End of the Play

The original printed edition provides a concluding Sanskrit stanza. Particular caution is needed regarding word divisions and doubtful letters.

May Vāsava send rain at the proper season and the earth abound in crops;
may this king remain ever victorious, so long as the lord of the planets endures.
As long as the Gaṅgā flourishes in the mass of Śiva's matted hair,
so long may the fame of the heroic King Jagatprakāśa, radiant with poetry, increase.

Textual difficulty: The final compound in the second line is not wholly certain in the printed edition. The ending 'bhaved—' of the first line and the 'āstāṃ' at the beginning of the second may be read as part of one continuous verbal sequence. No absolute textual decision is imposed here.

Śasyādipūrṇṇābhave— / dāstāṃ → *śasyādipūrṇā bhaved— / āstāṃ*: normalisation of conjunct letters, separation at the sandhi, and clarification of the grammatical structure.

Yāvad grahādhīśvaram → *yāvadgrahādhīśvaram*: spelling with the sandhi joined; chiefly a change of word division.

Kavitvojvalā → *kavitvojjvalā*: correction of spelling according to the standard Sanskrit word *ujjvala*.

Text revised according to Sanskrit grammar: The sandhi, conjunct letters, word divisions, and spelling of the benedictory stanza in the printed text have been edited in accordance with Sanskrit grammar and standard orthography. The distinction between the original printed text and the editorially revised text remains preserved.

Alphabetical Concordance to the Original Song Index

Entries 01–25	Entries 26–50	Entries 51–75
01. Extraordinary Beauty, Your Moonlike Face	26. I Shall See the Assembly of the Demon King	51. Bow, Fair One; the Sun Has Arisen
02. Sunābha, Why Are You So Proud Before Me?	27. I Shall Visit Your Hermitage	52. First Remember Lord Gaṇeśa
03. O God, Help Me through Your Own Son	28. Let Us Both Go to Prabhāvatī's Dwelling	53. The Great Sage Has Performed Penance Today
04. I Am Delighted; We Shall Go Beneath the Kadamba	29. Come, All of You, to My Assembly	54. My Mind Has Come to This Understanding
05. The Noble Sage Kaśyapa Has Come	30. Let Us Go to Śṛṅgārapura	55. Do Not Entertain Doubt Today
06. I Know Pradyumna's Life Has Found Fulfilment	31. Youth Lasts Only Four Days	56. The Demon Was Slain; All the Gods Rejoiced
07. The Excellent Country Named Bhaktapur	32. He Is My Father's Enemy; This Is Not Right	57. Mālatī, Mādhavī, Damana, and Bakula
08. My Beloved, How Beautiful You Are	33. I Remain Here to Kill You	58. Ghosts, Witches, Spirits, and Fiends Danced in Joy
09. Take This Woman into Your Care	34. I Longed to See Your City	59. Doe-eyed Lady, You Are So Young
10. From Where Have You Come to This Lake?	35. Hearing Your Words Will Bring Ruin	60. The Sun Unfolds the Lotus of the Solar Dynasty
11. Tell the Extraordinary Tale, Haṃsī	36. Hearing Your Words, My Life Trembles	61. Vajranābha, What Business Have I with You?
12. Why This Delay?	37. Gada and Sāmba, Your Understanding Is Slight	62. A Lotus Face, Eyes Like Wagtails
13. What Has Pradyumna Said? Shall We Both Go?	38. Lord, Hear One Petition / Apart from My Beloved I Have No Refuge	63. Vāsava Has Sent Me to You
14. What Has Happened to My Life?	39. Your Lotus-like Eyes, Beautiful as Lotus Petals	64. Hear My Story, O Messenger
15. What Will Become of My Life?	40. No Equal to Him in the Three Worlds	65. Listen to the Words of Both of Us

Entries 01–25	Entries 26–50	Entries 51–75
16. Show Compassion, Mother of the World	41. The Burden of Youth for Both of You	66. Listen, Fair Lady, to Something I Must Say
17. Guṇavatī, You Are Replete with Every Virtue	42. See the Beauty of This Lake	67. Listen, My Friend
18. I Shall Go Forth	43. Think Carefully about Kṛṣṇa's Son	68. Listen to the Song, O Woman
19. Come, Come, Let Us Go	44. I Received the Boon Given by the Grandfather	69. I Shall Go to the Painted House
20. Come, Sunābha, to Our Father's Presence	45. Indra, Lord of All the Gods	70. Listen to One Request of Mine
21. Come, Let Us Go to Our Assembly	46. Pradyumna, You Are Merely Human	71. Blessed Are We to Have Seen You
22. Come, Friend; Let Us Go to the Garden	47. Without a Husband a Helpless Woman Has No Beauty	72. I Am an Unfortunate Woman
23. Go Quickly, Jayanta, to Amarāvatī	48. Apart from My Beloved I Have No Refuge	73. I Shall Meditate upon God
24. Come, Brother Sunābha, to Your Own House	49. Dressed in Yellow, Four Beautiful Arms	74. I Shall Be Kandarpa and You Shall Be Prabhāvatī
25. Victory, O Mother; Grant Well-being	50. I Have Fulfilled Indra's Task	75. Śiva, Śiva, What Has Become of My Lord?

Dhūrtasamāgama and Prabhāvatīharaṇa: A Comparative Critical Appraisal

The Critical Premise

This study does not read the two plays through a straightforward opposition between the "ancient" and the "modern." Jyotirīśvara's original farce, *Dhūrtasamāgama*, and Dr Arvind Akku's Maithili performance script, published in 2020, belong to different historical textual strata. *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* is a seventeenth-century composition associated with the name of Jagatprakāśa Malla; its available literary basis is the text edited by Dr Lekhanātha Miśra. On the one hand stands a modern reconstruction of a farce; on the other, an edited version of a song-dominated drama from the Malla period. Without understanding this asymmetry, a simple verdict about "which is superior" would be misleading.

The comparison proceeds on five interconnected planes: plot and dramatic structure; characters, women's experience and power; song, language and *rasa*; acting, performance space and spectatorship; and textual history and editing. The original dramatic text, text-critical interpretation and external historical context are treated as separate levels of evidence. Where independent manuscript collation or audiovisual records of performances are unavailable, the conclusions are formulated as possibilities or proposals for direction.

1. The Comparative Landscape at a Glance

Basis of discussion	Dhūrt Samāgama	Prabhāvatīharaṇa
Historical setting of the original	Jyotirīśvara; generally located in fourteenth-century Mithilā	Jagatprakāśa Malla; a tradition associates the composition with 1656 CE
Text examined here	Dr Arvind Akku's modern Maithili performance script; first edition, 2020	Drama edited by Dr Lekhanātha Miśra; first edition, 1972; reprinted, 2013
Dramatic genre	Farce: comic incongruity and social satire	Mythological musical drama: erotic, heroic, marvellous and auspicious affect
Elements of construction	Eight scenes and a singers' ensemble in the modern performance script	Three acts, directions for three performance days, rāga songs and an internal play
Principal conflict	Religious disguise, lust, possession and partisan justice	Secret love, dynastic enmity, divine strategy and royal power
Women at the centre of the plot	From the objectification of Anaṅgasenā to her public refusal	Prabhāvatī's desire, Haṃsī's role as messenger and control of the inner apartments

Basis of discussion	Dhūrt Samāgama	Prabhāvatīharaṇa
Distinctive theatrical device	Travesty of a courtroom; critical commentary through song	Rāmāyaṇa play within the play, actors' disguises, flower garland and bee, rāga indications
Linguistic strata	Sanskrit–Prakrit–Maithili in the original; principally Maithili speech in the modern script	Maithili song, Sanskrit verse and a mixed dramatic language
Direction of the ending	Anaṅgasenā's public resistance and a song of collective welfare	Vajranābha's death, coronation, devotion and an auspicious ending
Documentary record	A list of modern stagings and indications of performance history	Manuscript, editorial introduction, song index and verse index

2. Literary History: Mithilā's Farce and the Malla Stage of Nepal

The literary origin of *Dhūrtasamāgama* lies within the Sanskrit–Prakrit–Maithili multilingual theatrical world of medieval Mithilā. Speech, the social identities of characters, and the language of songs constitute distinct auditory registers. To describe this original work as a "play written entirely in Maithili" would be incautious; it is more appropriate to call it a witness to the early theatrical tradition of Mithilā. Its fourteenth-century setting and association with the patronage of Harisiṃhadeva have been discussed in external manuscript studies. The eight-scene script available from 2020, however, cannot itself be treated as an unaltered fourteenth-century text.

The historical position of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* is bound up with the literary prestige of Maithili at the Malla court in Nepal. The cultural geography of its period extended beyond modern national borders: Mithilā's linguistic and musical traditions, royal patronage in Bhaktapur, and contact with Nepal Bhasa and Sanskrit were active together. Placing this composition within Maithili literary history and within Nepalese theatre history is therefore not a pair of contradictory claims but a complementary historiographical practice.

The approximately three centuries separating the two dramatic works do not describe a simple line of either "progress" or "decline." In one, cunning social figures drawn from everyday life and the travesty of justice predominate; in the other, the religious and musical splendour of a royal court, the politics of love, and kingship assume particular importance. At one level both works acknowledge the discipline of classical dramatic forms; at another, each reconstitutes them through regional language and local practices of performance.

3. The Fundamental Difference in Plot: Social Travesty versus Mythological Strategy

In Arvind Akku's *Dhūrt Samāgama*, religious instruction, almsgiving, the guru–disciple relationship, desire, claims of possession and the procedure of dispensing justice collide. Viśvanagara and Snātaka behave in ways that contradict their professions of self-restraint. The arrival of Anaṅgasenā converts private appetite into a public dispute. In the supposed court of Asajjāti Miśra, the adjudicator himself becomes partisan: an institution meant to resolve a dispute becomes a party to it. Anaṅgasenā's dissent in the concluding scene turns the plot towards public intervention.

In *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, love is bound to a political design from the outset. Indra's intention, the mission undertaken by Haṃsa and Haṃsī, Prabhāvatī's *pūrvarāga* or love before union, Pradyumna's disguise as an actor, the Rāmāyaṇa performance of the actor Bhadra, the extraordinary entry through a flower garland in the form of a bee, the disclosure of the secret, the battle and the coronation: these constitute an interconnected sequence moving towards a single objective. Prabhāvatī's love possesses an emotional truth of its own, yet mythological planning simultaneously makes that love an instrument for the destruction of Vajranābha.

A fundamental reversal becomes visible here. In *Dhūrt Samāgama*, deception and hypocrisy are matters for ethical interrogation; in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, one form of deception—the disguise of actors entering an enemy court—is an effective instrument of divine strategy. Both plays thus make "deception" a source of dramatic energy, but their ethical evaluations differ. In comparing them, it is not enough to say merely that "both contain deception"; we must ask who benefits from its outcome and who determines its legitimacy.

4. Structure: The Progressive Eruption of Eight Scenes and the Extension of Three Performance Days

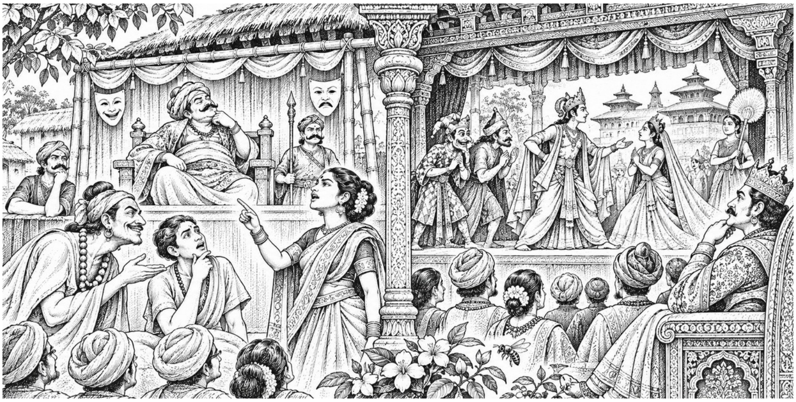
The modern arrangement of *Dhūrt Samāgama* rests on eight scenes. In the first the Sūtradhāra and Naṭī discuss the historical identity of the play; the second presents fear of the constable and external authority; the third introduces Anaṅgasenā; the fourth concerns alms, domestic relations and Suratapriyā; the fifth stages rivalry in desire; the sixth takes place in Asajjāti's court; the seventh presents claims to possession and their rebuttal; and the eighth contains a public address and a concluding song. Gradually the scenes move from private lust towards a public consciousness of justice.

Prabhāvatīharaṇa develops its three acts over three days of performance. The first day encompasses the entrances of characters, the *nāndī*, description of the kingdom, the political background to the gods and demons, and the arrival of Haṃsa and Haṃsī. The second centres on *pūrvarāga*, the entrance of Bhadra's troupe into the court, the play within the play, and the secret union. The third

brings the expansion of the stories of the other couples, discussion of the *rājasūya*, disclosure of the clandestine relationship, battle, victory and an auspicious conclusion. Measured against the conventions of modern event-driven drama, such amplitude may seem protracted; viewed in relation to singing, changes of costume and the daily division of performance, it possesses its own theatrical rhythm.

The movement of the first work is incident, incongruity and public disclosure; that of the second is recognition, expectation, disguised entry, eruption and royal resolution. To excise the second play's initial elaboration as unnecessary, or to dismiss the first play's final opposition as "mere preaching," would be to destroy the subtleties of both historical transformations. Nevertheless, both must be tested by the criterion of stage rhythm: an extended prologue and final address in one, and the presentation of numerous characters and an expansive internal play in the other, may affect dramatic concentration.

5. A Play within the Play: Self-Identification and Disguised Acting



Two theatrical orders of deception: the farcical tribunal and the masked royal performance

In both works the theatre makes its own existence a subject of the story. At the beginning of *Dhūrt Samāgama*, the Sūtradhāra and Naṭī exchange questions and answers about the play's identity, antiquity and relationship to its audience. This is a form of self-reflexive prologue: before starting the dramatic action, the stage recounts its own history. The device awakens the audience's cultural memory; nevertheless, if the exposition of history outweighs the characters' inner movement, it may delay the action.

In *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, self-reflexivity appears as a more intricate form of theatrical deception. Bhadra's enactment of the Rāmāyaṇa is understood in Vajranābha's court as a genuine artistic entertainment, whereas the external audience knows that the actors' disguised entry serves a secret purpose. There is not only a play within the play but an inequality between spectators' knowledge

and a character's ignorance. The enemy king accepts acting as an art and thereby opens a breach in his own defences. Art itself becomes an instrument of strategy.

This comparison yields a productive critical conclusion: *Dhūrt Samāgama* uses the stage to tear away the masks of society; *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* uses the theatrical mask to bring a secret plan to fruition. The distance between acting and actuality is indispensable to the grammar of both works, but in the first it becomes an instrument of disclosure and in the second an instrument of concealment.

6. Knowledge, Authority and the Audience's Ethical Position

In Asajjāti Miśra's court, characters perform the formalities of justice; the audience immediately perceives that the person entrusted with deciding truth is driven by hunger for personal gain. At this point the audience possesses greater ethical knowledge than the characters. The disparity between the judge's artificial prestige and his actual greed produces laughter. A satirical song-line such as "They drive truthful speech far away" makes the apparent praise of judicial virtues signify its opposite.

At Vajranābha's court, too, the principal audience knows the concealed purpose of the acting, while the king does not. Yet the moral implication of this secret knowledge within the dramatic world differs from the travesty of the court of justice. The spectators are invited to accept the divine party's intention; Vajranābha's taste for art becomes a political vulnerability. The same device of "the spectators know more" thus leads to different ethical consequences in the two plays.

This question leads to another: does the play itself grant its spectators an independent right to judge, or direct them to follow a moral code determined in advance? The satirical opposition in *Dhūrt Samāgama* encourages the audience towards self-examination; the divine design of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* places before it the justification of the victorious party. Nevertheless, Vajranābha's family, Prabhāvatī's dilemma and the secrecy of the love affair prevent that framework from becoming entirely untroubled.

7. Women Characters: Anaṅgasenā, Prabhāvatī and Haṃsī

At the beginning, Anaṅgasenā becomes the object of rivalry between guru and disciple. The male gaze upon her body and competing claims to possess her drive many scenes. In the final scene of the modern performance script, Anaṅgasenā publicly expresses dissent; an utterance such as "I shall under no circumstances accept Asajjāti Miśra" becomes not merely a personal refusal but a declaration of the right to decide. Criticism must also ask how much independent dialogue and constructive action she is given during the preceding seven scenes. The final speech does not automatically undo the earlier objectification: it marks a historical point of opposition to it.

Prabhāvatī's position is different. She questions Haṃsī, hears accounts of Pradyumna's virtues, remembers the enmity between her father and Kṛṣṇa, and ultimately expresses her own desire. In this sense she is not simply a passive prize. Yet her choice cannot become an independent and legally recognised decision in the royal assembly: the social recognition of a secret love is secured only after the male warrior's victory and the triumph of divine politics. Active desire in the emotional world and restricted authority in the institutional order constitute the central contradiction of Prabhāvatī's character.

Haṃsī opens a third possibility. She creates pathways of communication from lake to royal court, from court to inner apartments, and into the world of the acting troupe. Anaṅgasenā becomes a voice of direct dissent; Prabhāvatī represents an intimate choice in love; Haṃsī directs movement, language and stratagem. Yet even Haṃsī's ingenuity is not autonomous from Indra's strategic goal. Comparing all three displaces the linear question "Is the woman character strong or not?" with more precise questions: who has the power to advance the narrative, to give consent, and to make public decisions?

A uniform modern standard of autonomy should not be applied mechanically to Anaṅgasenā and Prabhāvatī. The public resistance in the first play's present-day version is an achievement of the modern adapter's transformation; the second creates a linguistic place for love within a seventeenth-century courtly and mythological design. It is fairer to judge both according to the dramatic possibilities of their own periods and the contradictions internal to their texts.

8. Male Characters and the Exchange of Roles: Guru, Judge, Actor and King

Viśvanagara and Snātaka in *Dhūrt Samāgama* seek ethical prestige through the external marks of religion, but their speech is governed by desire, jealousy and personal advantage. The hierarchy of guru and disciple collapses before their identical appetites: spiritual instruction becomes a contest. Asajjāti Miśra makes this private incongruity institutional; seated upon the judicial bench, he bends the entire procedure towards his own interests. The farce thus exposes structural corruption alongside the failings of individuals.

Pradyumna in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* takes several guises: lover, warrior, actor and bee. His exchange of roles represents a use of deception sanctioned by power. Vajranābha embodies a complicated conjunction of royal arrogance, familial authority and attraction to art; to call him merely an ignorant villain diminishes the play's tension. His defence of the inner apartments is severe, but his wish to welcome performers into his court renders that severity ineffective.

The comparison sharpens the contrast between office and role: the guru conceals unclean desires beneath religious attire, the judge self-interest beneath the robes of justice, and Pradyumna a secret political mission beneath an actor's disguise. All three kinds of covering give the story its causes; yet the farce attacks the

absurdity of concealment, while the mythological play demonstrates the efficacy of disguised acting.

9. Song and Music: The Critical Chorus and the Bearer of Dramatic Time

In the modern script of *Dhūrt Samāgama*, the singers' ensemble supplies a narrative thread between scenes. The constable's blustering song creates the absurd terror of authority; the alms-song of guru and disciple lays bare fraudulent mendicancy; Asajjāti's entrance song exposes judicial corruption by means of inverted praise; and the final auspicious song joins the bitterness of satire to an aspiration for collective welfare. The chief function of these songs is not merely to evoke emotion but to distinguish the claims of the characters from the playwright's critical distance.

In *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, song is almost the primary medium of narration. The *nāndī* establishes a theatrical cosmos; dawn songs mark a change of performance day; songs of the lake imagine the beauty of place; love songs make Prabhāvatī's psychological transformation audible; the companions' songs extend the desire for marriage; and the post-battle verses and auspicious songs connect a Vaiṣṇava-mythological victory with remembrance of Śiva and the Goddess. Rāga names, refrains, the beginnings of songs and accompanying dialogue are elements of dramatic action.

The statement that the song index contains seventy-five entries calls for particular caution. Without verification, this must not be taken as an established count of seventy-five distinct and complete songs; the available criticism indicates the possibility of variant opening lines for the same song or repeated index entries. The full sequence of songs, their rāgas and their historical melodies require continuous comparison of the printed original with the manuscript.

Whether a song "interrupts dialogue" or "completes the meaning of dialogue" can be determined only through its dramatic function. In the farce, songs often serve as a commentator and a collective satirical perspective; in the musical drama, they underpin time, love, regional colour and a religious world order. A new staging of the former requires clarity of language and sharply articulated pauses around the songs; the latter requires a structure coordinating rāga, emotional state, entrance and musical accompaniment.

10. Language: A Multilingual History and the Living Stage Language of Maithili

The interplay of Sanskrit and Prakrit dialogue with Maithili song in the original *Dhūrtasamāgama* expresses differences of character status, literary authority and the region's acoustic life. The modern performance script reaches a broad social audience chiefly through spoken Maithili dialogue, within which Sanskrit-

derived legal terms, religious vocabulary, popular sayings and contemporary rhythms of conversation form several layers. Linguistic modernisation makes the drama more accessible on stage, but it would be wrong to attribute this language to the historical original.

The music-rich poetic form of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* brings together Maithili lyrics, Sanskrit verses and older regional verbal forms. Signals such as "Now on the second day," character addresses and "in the first corner" convey not only semantic content but rules of performance. To mistake an old form for an "error" and improve it into accessible modern Maithili may alter the play's historical sound and its theatrical grammar. Textual correction and linguistic simplification are therefore distinct editorial operations.

The comparison of linguistic beauty must likewise be read in relation to *rasa*. The force of the farce resides in immediate repartee, sarcasm, naming and the exact timing of silence. The musical drama depends on repetition, refrain, sound adapted to rāga, ornamentation and flowing indications of time. In the former, the spoken quality of stage language causes humour to flash forth; in the latter, singable language expands a scene into emotional duration.

II. Rasa, Emotion and the Purposes of Dramaturgy

The primary movement of *Dhūrt Samāgama* is towards *hāsya*, the comic *rasa*, but it also admits suggestions of disgust, angry resistance, the pathos of humiliation and an awareness of social incongruity. The opposition between outward appearance and conduct gives rise to laughter; Anaṅgasenā's refusal can transform that laughter into an uneasy silence. If the actors turn every episode into the same kind of guffaw, the work's social questions will be weakened.

In *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, *śṛṅgāra* develops through love before union, separation, the messenger's work and fulfilment; *vīra* through warfare and the assertion of the divine party; *adbhuta* through transformation into a bee and divine illusion; and tranquillity and devotional feeling through the auspicious conclusion. Humour or playfulness may arise in the performances of Bhadra's company, but the dominant theatrical sensibility differs from that of the farce. Simply attaching classical labels to this constellation of *rasas* is insufficient: the relations between songs and their contexts, bodily action, the use of performance space and the audience's experience must be considered together.

No hierarchy of excellence based on *rasa* follows from these differences. Bitter laughter can itself become a mode of understanding, just as erotic emotion can become the vehicle of royal ideology. The value of each work lies in its ability to achieve its own intended theatrical effect: the first's discomforting laughter and the second's many-voiced musical and dramatic resolution.

12. Religion, Rājadharma and Justice: Contrary Structures of the Moral World

To describe *Dhūrt Samāgama* simply as an antireligious work would be reductive. The principal target of its criticism is the contradiction between the outward insignia of religion and actual greed. The teachers' subjection to lust, mendicancy used for private gain, and the judge's corruption reveal the institutional erosion of moral authority. Asajjāti's judicial bench does not present an absence of justice, a blank space where "there is no justice"; it stages injustice in the name of justice.

In the divine–demonic struggle of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, religious legitimacy is arranged from the beginning of the story. Indra and Kṛṣṇa's party begin their plan before physical warfare. As love develops, the defeat of the demon king acquires a predetermined mythological meaning. Yet the ending is not a narrow glorification of a single deity: in a world of action centred on Kṛṣṇa, references to the name of Śiva, praise of the Goddess and invocations of universal welfare coexist.

A comparison of the conceptions of justice in the two plays is especially fruitful. The farce initiates judicial proceedings, only for the judge's personal desire to break down the procedure; the musical play seeks justice in the final outcome of divine victory and royal replacement. The former asks: how is an impartial verdict possible? The dramatic world of the latter asks: whose victory is to be regarded as consonant with *dharma*? Modern constitutional criteria should not be imposed mechanically upon history, but critical questions about the narrative legitimation of violence and authority must certainly be raised.

13. Social Geography: Street, Alms and Courtroom versus Lake, Inner Apartments and Royal Assembly

The urban life of *Dhūrt Samāgama* contains streets, residential neighbourhoods, places where alms are sought, a constable's presence and a judicial court. Ordinary people confront religious occupations, violence, money and institutional authority. The naming of characters is itself farcical: names such as Asajjāti, Mūlanāśaka and Vidūṣaka foreshadow criticism of conduct. It would be mistaken to treat these names as simple representations of contemporary caste communities; their social significance should be determined by the characters' actions and speech.

The spaces of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* include royal courts, the assembly of gods, a lake, inner apartments, an āśrama and a battlefield. Changing place also changes emotion and power: the lake becomes the site of clandestine communication in love; the inner apartments, of control and concealed entry; the king's chamber, of public authority; the acting troupe, a temporary intervening space of disguise; and the battlefield, of the final decision about power.

The first play's stage caricatures the many-layered conduct of an urban society; the second follows the circulation of secrets between the court and the inner apartments within a bounded royal world. To classify them merely as "popular theatre" and "elite drama" would be too simple. The farce has classical patterns of speech; Malla-period theatre has popular song and a vivid sense of spectacle. Both rest upon the reciprocal contact of *śāstra* and the vernacular or popular sphere.

14. Body, Mask and Acting: Criteria of Stage Practice

For the actors of *Dhūrt Samāgama*, the contradiction between costume and character is the most significant instrument of performance. Viśvanagara's outward gravity and inner lack of restraint, Snātaka's discipleship and rivalry, Asajjāti's elevated seat and private greed: all should become perceptible in bodily and vocal rhythms. The constable's staff can be a controlled, exaggerated symbol of fear rather than actual violence. Silence or a brief pause after a song becomes an artistic means of passing from laughter to resistance.

The performance of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* appears to demand four distinct rhythms: the dignity of a royal assembly, the intimacy of conversation between messenger and companion, the dancing transformations of the actors' troupe, and the coordinated bodily movement of combat. In the play within the play, one actor may change through several roles. Instead of rendering the transformation into a bee as a modern realist imitation of an insect, one might suggest it through a flower, shadow, fabric, hand gesture or puppet. This is a proposal for present-day performance, not an established description of historical staging.

The central term of performance for both works is "distance": a character believes in his or her own mask, while the audience understands its contradiction. Yet in *Dhūrt Samāgama* the actor demonstrates the failure of the mask; in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* the performer demonstrates its success. A production that captures this subtle distinction will preserve the distinctiveness of each play.

15. Performance Space, Lighting and Scenic Transitions

The modern *Dhūrt Samāgama* script offers clear signals through lighting, entrances and songs for changes of scene. An elevated bench for the courtroom, travestied formality in the name of justice, and Anaṅgasenā's final acquisition of a public place can achieve strong visual effects with minimal resources. The light falling on Anaṅgasenā in the final scene, with the male characters standing behind her, provides a powerful image of the spatial redistribution of power. Nevertheless, a complete blackout between every scene might fragment the narrative; transitions through the singers' ensemble and the movement of characters may be more fluid.

In *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, spatial indications such as "in the corner," the entrance of the troupe, beginnings of songs, the *nāndī*, offstage space and act divisions suggest possible open or multi-area performance practices. These signals alone cannot establish a definite plan of the historical stage, the size of the audience or the lighting system. A modern director can create several imaginary locations on a stable base stage—the central area as royal assembly, a side area as lake, a raised platform as inner apartments, and a fixed place for the musicians—but this is creative stage design, not a reproduction of history.

In theatrical terms, *Dhūrt Samāgama* demands a compact and shifting social arrangement; *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* requires a prolonged, music-dependent arrangement with several symbolic locations. Neither requires heavy naturalistic scenery. A system of signals through acting, voice and lighting may convey the plot's secrets and ideas more precisely.

16. Audiences and the History of Performance

A list of modern stagings accompanies Arvind Akku's performance script. References to performances on different occasions between 1986 and 2020 document the collective labour of contemporary Maithili theatre practitioners. But a list of dates, venues or performers does not establish that all those stagings followed the same artistic method or provoked identical audience responses. Video records of the acting, directors' working notebooks, sound recordings and contemporary journalistic reviews would be required.

The textual indication that *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* was to be performed over three days is exceptionally important for theatre history. It remains, however, evidence in the text, not a surviving film of an old production. From it one may consider possible arrangements of performance time, musical intervals, costume changes and royal ceremony; one cannot reconstruct every instant of an actual historical staging with certainty.

The two plays make different demands upon the audience. The farce activates memories of social experience and makes the spectator a participant in questioning; the musical drama binds spectators into an extended collective time through a range of rāgas and emotions. The chief effect of the former may be uncomfortable laughter; that of the latter, emotional and religious resolution. Interviews with spectators from different social groups would be needed to record actual audience reactions at contemporary productions.

17. Conclusions on Stage: The Public Character of Resistance and the Collective Auspiciousness of Victory

The final scene of *Dhūrt Samāgama* changes a woman from an object displayed in the drama into a public speaker. Anaṅgasenā's dissent sets limits to the claims of the guru, disciple and corrupt judge. The subsequent auspicious song, which aspires to "a bond of love among all people," turns the edge of satire towards

social fellowship. The ending will succeed if its moral dialogue is heard not as an erasure of the bitterness of conflict but as a response to it.

In *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, the progression from victory to conclusion provides a combined resolution of love, kingship and religion. Vajranābha's death, Pradyumna's coronation, the return of the couples and the auspicious culmination in invocations of Śiva and the Goddess establish a stable mythological world. The grief of the defeated party, the social cost of royal succession and the public recognition of Prabhāvatī's independent choice remain comparatively indistinct. Such absences must be criticised with an understanding of the different dramatic objectives of the period.

Thus one play exposes the injustice of an existing order and imagines collective welfare; the other establishes a victorious order and displays religious auspiciousness. This difference joins their common questions about women, power, justice, music and the visual form of their endings.

18. Close Comparative Reading: Five Direct Similarities and Differences

18.1. "They Drive Truthful Speech Far Away" and Vajranābha's Court

Asajjāti's judicial song employs the satire of inverted praise: its words celebrate the judge's power, while its meaning exposes injustice. In *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, Vajranābha summons the actors into his court; his royal command itself becomes the path to a political crisis of his own making. In both episodes, the posture of authority fails to control the outcome. The difference is that in the farce the delusion of authority generates laughter, whereas in the musical play the ruler's error becomes the secret passage necessary to the narrative's victory.

18.2. Anaṅgasenā's "Under No Circumstances" and Prabhāvatī's Dilemma

The expression "under no circumstances" (*kathamapi*) intensifies the force of refusal in Anaṅgasenā's utterance. In Prabhāvatī's dialogue, the enmity between her father and her desired bridegroom is the source of the difficulty of choice. Both women speak about questions concerning their bodies and lives; the one does so as public prohibition, the other as a secret and intimate assent. In either context the place accorded to a woman's speech constitutes an important commentary on the royal and patriarchal order itself.

18.3. The Constable's Threat and Bhadra's "Dance the Rāmāyaṇa"

The sound of the constable's staff frightens the body, and the deceit of guru and disciple suddenly becomes vulnerable. Bhadra's acting attracts royal power and lessens the alertness of the guards. On one side stands fear of the state's force; on the other, the allure of artistic power. In both, bodily responses produce real changes in the narrative.

18.4. The Singers' Ensemble and the Dawn Song

The farce's singers' ensemble becomes a kind of collective ethical commentator for the audience. A dawn song in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, such as "Bow, fair one, the sun has risen," changes the time of the performance day and turns a night of separation into fresh expectation. The former song generally calls critically upon the audience to ask "what are we to think?"; the latter constructs dramatic time by establishing "when, and in what emotional state?"

18.5. Public Dissent and Coronation

At the end of the farce, Anaṅgasenā announces the limits of men's claims upon her; after military victory, Pradyumna receives a throne. In both plays, a question about authority is resolved at the conclusion, but authority itself means different things: in one it is an individual's right to consent or refuse, in the other a divine and royal right of succession. Historical restraint is required when modern political vocabulary is applied to this comparison.

19. Critical Assessment: Achievements and Limitations

The Distinctive Achievement of Dhūrt Samāgama

Transforming humour from entertainment into social criticism; extending satire from guru–disciple hypocrisy to the courtroom; making vigorous use of audible, popular Maithili dialogue; linking the dramatic narrative through the singers' ensemble; and giving Anaṅgasenā a final public act of dissent: these are significant achievements of the modern performance script. Its limitations include the Sūtradhāra's lengthy expository opening, dependence on lighting for certain scene changes, the prolonged containment of the woman within a male field of vision, and the risk of didacticism in the final declaration.

The Distinctive Achievement of Prabhāvatīharaṇa

Connecting the inner feeling of love to divine strategy and royal events; Haṃsī's active function as messenger; Bhadra's Rāmāyaṇa as a play within the play; the striking flower-garland-and-bee transformation; the development of time and emotion through songs and rāgas; and the multideity ending: these are the work's creative strengths. Its limitations may be seen in the lengthy introduction of characters, the uneven extension of episodes subsidiary to the central love story, the limited moral self-doubt of the heroic party, the slight space allotted to grief within the defeated family, and the dependence of institutional acceptance of love upon male victory.

These achievements and deficiencies should not be compared by the standards "the more modern, the better" or "the older, the more authentic." The farce's edge lies in its immediate linguistic and intellectual opposition; the splendour of the musical drama resides in its imagination of collective singing and its long cultural memory. Their capabilities are different, and the contemporary

director's task should be to preserve the internal demands of each work while bringing it into conversation with new audiences.

20. Two Distinct Directorial Frameworks for Revival

For the Farce: A Minimal Stage and Incisive Verbal Satire

All eight scenes could be performed on a shared, adaptable stage. Three chief visual signs would suffice: the implements of religious disguise, the constable's staff and the judge's high seat. The singers' ensemble could remain to one side, connecting scene changes through music; amplification should be restrained so that the meaning of the songs remains clear. During Anaṅgasenā's final statement, the male characters should withdraw and the lighting should place her at the visual centre. A brief pause after laughter subsides would sharpen the force of her refusal. This is a proposal for contemporary direction, not a description of the original staging.

For the Musical Drama: Symbolic Multiple Spaces and Live Singing

The distinctive internal rhythm of the three performance days should be retained. Spatial relations between the singers, the acting troupe and the characters of the story should be clear. The lake could be created by changes in light and fabric colour, the inner apartments by the suggestion of a curtain or doorway, and warfare by rhythmically coordinated group movement. Rather than eliminating the "Dance the Rāmāyaṇa" episode, it should be incorporated in a condensed form within the director's available time, for it clarifies the drama's grammar of disguised performance. The entry as a bee calls for a metaphorical conjunction of flower, body and light; the emotional episodes require separate study of their rāga indications.

Order within a Shared Theatre Festival

If both works were presented at one theatre festival, the *Dhūrt Samāgama* farce could precede a selection of complete acts or a full performance of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*. Yet to turn the complete texts into "two parts of one play" would be a literary injustice. A short intervening discussion could ask spectators what difference they experienced between the critical mask of laughter and the accepted mask of mythological narration.

21. Text-Critical Caution: Original, Edited Text and Adaptation

In studying *Dhūrt Samāgama*, it is indispensable to keep three levels distinct: Jyotirīśvara's early original farce; the manuscript and printed editorial tradition; and Dr Arvind Akku's modern Maithili performance script. Similarities and differences in their dialogue, arrangements of characters and lines of song cannot be held certain without line-by-line collation against the original. To present the modern Anaṅgasenā's final resistance as a verbatim part of Jyotirīśvara's fourteenth-century text would be unsupported by evidence.

In *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, numerous differences may exist between the Newar-script manuscript and the edited Devanagari text in letters, division of words, rāga names, refrain markers and Sanskrit verses. Lekhanātha Miśra's reported editorial decisions—particularly over *ra/la*, *va/ba*, word division and corrections aligned to Sanskrit grammar—are an important part of its research history. Nevertheless, the original printed reading, a reading revised according to Sanskrit grammar, and the reading established from manuscript evidence are three separate categories. A revised verse should not be printed as the sole unquestioned historical original without explicit annotation.

Any future critical edition of the two works should observe one principle: do not "correct" a text invisibly; make the original reading, reason for emendation, alternatives and evidence explicit. In drama, songs, pauses, stage directions and the position of the chorus are also integral to the text. If words are preserved but indications of acting are erased, the history of performance will remain incomplete.

22. Conclusion: Two Complementary Axes of the Maithili Theatrical Tradition

The original dramatic force of *Dhūrt Samāgama* is the dismantling of social masks. That of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* is the construction of a mythological and political world through acting, song and disguise. Both consider the relationship between society and power, but their modes of questioning differ: the farce cross-examines the claims of institutions; the musical play gathers the policy, love and auspiciousness of the victorious party into a unified spectacle.

Women's desire becomes a turning point in both narratives, but the authority accorded to women is not identical. Anaṅgasenā becomes the visual centre of public resistance; Prabhāvatī's desire provides the intimate dramatic foundation of love; Haṃsī undertakes strategic mediation. Song is important to both aesthetic systems—as collective criticism in the farce, and as the ground of time, *rasa* and the construction of imagery in the musical drama. Their theatrical distinctiveness is so profound that neither a synopsis of plot nor classification by Sanskrit dramaturgy alone can disclose their full significance.

A suitable critical account of Maithili theatre history would therefore recognise that a theatrical consciousness exposing social absurdity, and the emotionally and politically charged consciousness of collective musical drama, together enlarge Maithili's performance tradition. Instead of confining them to fixed oppositions such as "earlier" and "later," "popular" and "courtly," or "independent" and "patronised," we should read them within the historical interrelations of text, manuscript, music, performer and audience.

Sources and Limits of Evidence

Primary work one: Jyotirīśvara Ṭhākura (original); Dr Arvind Akku (Maithili performance script), *Dhūrt Samāgama*, Navārambh, first edition 2020. The

textual evidence of this volume's plot structure, songs and dialogue, scenes and list of modern stagings has not been treated as equivalent to a complete critical collation of readings in the original Jyotirīśvara text.

Primary work two: *Prabhāvatīharaṇa Nāṭaka*, attributed to Jagatprakāśa Malla, edited by Dr Lekhanātha Miśra; first edition 1972, reprint 2013. Its three acts, indications of performance days, play within the play, song index and stage directions provide the basis of the discussion. This study has not independently re-examined every letter of the original Newar-script manuscript.

External historical context: Ripunjaya Kumar Thakur, "The Dhūrtasamāgama of Jyotirīśvara," research abstract for the Jñāna Bhāratam conference, Ministry of Culture, 2025; Rāmadeva Jhā, *Jagatprakāśa Malla*, Sahitya Akademi, 1990; Rāmāvatāra Yādava, "A Hitherto Undiscovered and Unstudied Newari Manuscript of a Maithili Bārahamāsā Song by King Jagatprakāśamalla," published conference proceedings, 2019; Makoto Kitada, study of Jagatprakāśa Malla's Maithili–Nepal Bhasa expressions of separation, 2026. Such external sources are useful principally for historical context, not as substitutes for the original words of either play.

Possible areas for further textual research: a parallel reading of Jyotirīśvara's original and the modern eight-scene performance script; letter-by-letter collation of the Malla-period Newar-script manuscript with edited Devanagari; documentary theatre-historical study of all ten listed stagings of the farce; a comparison between the seventy-five entries in the *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* song index and the count of genuinely distinct song texts; and archival study of traditional melodies associated with rāgas and of staging practice. These are the next questions for research, not established conclusions.

Text-Critical Appendix

The Original Songs and Dialogue of Jyotirīśvara and Those of Prabhāvatīharaṇa: Parallel Readings, Musical Design and Theatrical Significance

A. Textual Bases, Method and Policy of Quotation

This appendix does not treat the two versions of *Dhūrt Samāgama* as a single text. Jyotirīśvara Ṭhākura's early farce, combining Sanskrit, Prakrit and Maithili; Dr Arvind Akku's Maithili performance script published by Navārambh in 2020; and its modern songs and dialogue constitute three distinct textual strata. For Jyotirīśvara's original songs, the basis here is *Maithilī-Dhūrtasamāgama*.

For *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, the basis is the printed edition, associated with the name of Jagatprakāśa Malla and edited by Dr Lekhanātha Miśra. The original songs' rāga names, refrains, entrances, provisions for corners, and names of characters are themselves dramatic evidence. The two texts are grouped according to shared

topics; this is not established proof that they are translations or imitations of each other, or that one historically influenced the other.

Quotations are brief and directed to particular purposes. The old spellings, particles such as *re*, refrain signs such as *dhruvaṃ*, and Prakrit pronunciation are not silently changed into modern Maithili. Where manuscript letters appear unclear, intelligible opening words have been selected instead of quoting uncertain portions. Correction of a primary text and explanation of its meanings are separate tasks.

1. Auspicious Opening, Rāga and Entrance into Performance

Jyotirīśvara: Dhūrtasamāgama	Jagatprakāśa Malla: Prabhāvatīharaṇa
Rāga Vibhāsa. "Now my departure is not far away." ॥ विभासरागे ॥ "एखने हमर गमन नहि दूरे"	NĀNDĪ SONG, GAU. "First I remember Lord Gaṇeśa; / grant the boon of fearlessness and turn distress to joy." नान्दी गीतं ॥ गौ ॥ "प्रथमहि सुमरओ गुरु गणेश । देहु अभय वर हरषु कलेश ॥"

Textual basis: (a) the opening song in Rāga Vibhāsa in *Maithilī-Dhūrtasamāgama*; (b) the opening *nāndī* song in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*.

Comparative discussion—Both plays establish their performance space through song. Yet the opening of the farce creates a worldly movement, restless desire and a field for humour; the Gaṇeśa invocation in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* places the theatrical activity within a religious and royal procedure of auspicious commencement. Their similarity does not lie simply in the "presence of songs," but in the way singing inaugurates the dramatic world.

Textual caution—Because the other words in the Vibhāsa song of *Dhūrtasamāgama* show damaged letters, no complete additional line has been proposed here.

2. Intimate Address: The Comic Song and the Love Song

Jyotirīśvara: Dhūrtasamāgama	Jagatprakāśa Malla: Prabhāvatīharaṇa

Rāga Barāḍī, Ekatālī rhythm. "I shall perform *mithiā*, O; / fair-faced one, I shall perform *mithiā*, O." Refrain. The old word *mithiā* is retained because its reading is uncertain. ॥ बराड़ीरागे ॥ एकतालीताले ॥ "मिथिआ मोरि करब रे । सुवदनि मिथिआ मोरि करब रे आ ॥ ध्रुवं ॥"	"Youth remains for only four days; / fair woman, drive away the heat of desire." "जोवन समय रहय दिन चारि । मदन ताप दूर करु वरनारि ॥"

Textual basis: (a) the sung passage in Rāga Barāḍī in *Maithilī-Dhūrtasamāgama*; (b) a woman's song in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, in an episode bearing the indication of Mālava.

Comparative discussion—In *Dhūrtasamāgama*, the rhythm of address to the beloved makes the actor-character's restlessness and embodied desire instruments of farce. In *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, references to the transience of youth and the heat of Kāma advance the narrative of love before union and eventual encounter. The contrast between humorous and satirical tension and the anguish of erotic desire must be heard within a shared lyric vocabulary.

Textual caution—The word *mithiā* has not been changed into the modern *mithyā* ("false"); determination of the old form's meaning requires the context of the whole stanza.

3. The Description of Beauty: The Spectator's Gaze and the Woman's Voice

Jyotirīśvara: Dhūrtasamāgama	Jagatprakāśa Malla: Prabhāvatīharaṇa
Rāga Mālava, Ekatālī rhythm. "How many women skilled in the arts, O! / She comes, *suvihi*, gathering beauty in her heart, O." Refrain. The old reading *suvihi* remains unresolved. ॥ मालवरागे ॥ एकतालीताले ॥ "कत ने कलावति नारि रे आ । अवत सुविहि चित रूप बटोरि रे आ ॥ ध्रुवं ॥"	Dhanāśrī, *co* indication. "O beloved, how beautiful you are!" Refrain. धनाश्री ॥ चो ॥ "ए पिया तोहे सुन्दर रे ॥ ध्रु० ॥"

Textual basis: (a) a song associated with Anaṅgasenā's entrance in *Maithilī-Dhūrtasamāgama*; (b) an episode of love songs concerning Prabhāvatī and Pradyumna in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*.

Comparative discussion—In the first farce, the sung description of beauty discloses the satirical crisis of the male gaze, attraction and the desire to possess. In the second song, the beloved herself describes the person she loves from her own perspective. At one point a woman is made the centre of several competing desires; at the other, the woman's speech directs its gaze back upon the lover. Actor, singer and lighting director should keep this difference of perspective clear on stage.

Textual caution—The phonetic reading of the line containing *avata suvihi* is based on the old printed copy; no alteration of letters has been undertaken without a parallel manuscript reading.

4. Movement and Dramatic Pace in Indications Supplied by Song

Jyotirīśvara: Dhūrtasamāgama	Jagatprakāśa Malla: Prabhāvatīharaṇa
"Come, come, clever one …" (the legible opening words of the original song). "चल चल चतुरमा …" (मूल गीतक आरम्भिक स्पष्ट अंश)	Pahaḍiyā, Mālava, *co* indication. "Come, let us go to my assembly; / all the immortals have brought me many sorrows." पहडिया ॥ मालव ॥ चो ॥ "चलहु जायब लोके सभा हमरे । अनेक दुख देल हमे सकल अमरे ॥"

Textual basis: (a) a passage indicating movement through song in *Maithilī-Dhūrtasamāgama*; (b) Vajranābha's movement towards the royal assembly in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*.

Comparative discussion—At times a song is not an occasion of emotional stillness but an indication of scenic transition. The repetition "cal cal" ("come, come") in the first passage demands immediate motion, gait and quickness in acting. In the second, the "assembly" becomes a collective political space. The comparison demonstrates that medieval Maithili lyric language is also a functional grammar of performance.

Textual caution—Because the words following the first song's opening are unclear, an ellipsis has been used in the quotation. This is an editorial sign of omission, not a part of the original text.

5. The Woman Character's Utterance: Independent Speech and Strategic Dialogue

Jyotirīśvara: Dhūrtasamāgama	Jagatprakāśa Malla: Prabhāvatīharaṇa
Anaṅgasenā: "This has become a farce of an assembly of rogues." अनंगसेना : "एदं धुत्त-समागम-पहसणं संबुत्तं ।"	Prabhāvatī: "O Haṃsī!" / Haṃsī: "O Prabhāvatī!" (mutual address at the encounter beside the lake). प्रभावती : "हे हंसी !" हंसी : "हे प्रभावती !" (सरोवर-भेटक परस्पर सम्बोधन)

Textual basis: (a) Jyotirīśvara's original Prakrit dialogue, with auxiliary comparison against the electronic text of *Dhūrtasamāgamaḥ*; (b) the dialogue between Prabhāvatī and Haṃsī in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*.

Comparative discussion—Anaṅgasenā's words name the deceit enacted on stage and make the farce reflect critically upon itself. In the woman-to-woman dialogue of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, question and answer seek a path for love. The first voice recognises the situation of satire; the second gives feeling strategic motion. Neither form of "agency" is identical to modern theories of rights, but neither leaves the movement of the story wholly dependent upon the men's outward pronouncements.

Textual caution—The first quotation in this pair is a prose utterance in Prakrit, not a song; it would be wrong to call quotations from different genres the same kind of "song."

6. Justice, Command and the Voice of Power

Jyotirīśvara: Dhūrtasamāgama	Jagatprakāśa Malla: Prabhāvatīharaṇa
Asajjāti Miśra: "She is not yours; nor is she yours either. / The fortunate woman standing beside me is mine." असज्जाति मिश्र : "नैषा त्वदीया भवतोऽपि नेयं मत्संनिधिष्ठा सुभगा मदीया ।"	King: "O minister! Has Ṛṣyaśṛṅga not arrived?" / Minister: "Your Majesty, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga seems to have arrived." राजा : "हे मन्त्री ! ऋष्यशृङ्ग काहाँ नहि आयलछ ?" मन्त्री : "महाराज ! ऋष्यशृङ्ग आयल प्राय ।"

Textual basis: (a) the ironically framed judicial decision concerning the dispute in Jyotirīśvara's original farce; (b) dialogue from the royal assembly in the Rāmāyaṇa play within *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*.

Comparative discussion—In *Dhūrtasamāgama*, the person deciding the case declares his own interest to be justice; the courtroom becomes an extension of the desire to possess. In the internal drama of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, a king commands actors and the system of messengers, thereby making the entrance of deception possible. The linguistic hierarchy of authority is clear in both; but the farce exposes the collapse of the judicial system, while the play within the play discloses a weakness inside the political order.

Textual caution—The first quotation gives only the first half of an original Sanskrit verse; possible variant readings of the complete stanza require independent examination.

7. Religious Language: Questioning Hypocrisy and the Procedure of Auspicious Invocation

Jyotirīśvara: Dhūrtasamāgama	Jagatprakāśa Malla: Prabhāvatīharaṇa
"His hands are adorned with staff and water-pot; / his head is beautifully marked with a tilaka." "दण्ड-कमण्डलु-मण्डित-हस्तः सुललित-तिलक-विभूषित-मस्तः ।"	"First I remember Lord Gaṇeśa; / grant the boon of fearlessness and turn distress to joy." "प्रथमहि सुमरओ गुरु गणेश । देहु अभय वर हरषु कलेश ॥"

Textual basis: (a) the Sanskrit description of a character in the prologue to Jyotirīśvara's work; (b) the Gaṇeśa invocation in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*.

Comparative discussion—The first passage emphasises the external appearance of a bearer of religious marks and immediately introduces the possibility of deceit. In the second, religious address constitutes the rite of opening. The theatrical functions of similar religious imagery are contrary: conflict between dress and conduct on the one hand, and the auspicious consecration of the stage on the other. This difference should not be hurriedly reduced to the assertion that "one play opposes religion and the other supports it."

8. The Direction of the Conclusion: Exposure of Deceit versus Political Outcome

Jyotirīśvara: Dhūrtasamāgama	Jagatprakāśa Malla: Prabhāvatīharaṇa
Asajjāti Miśra: "Through deception the entire realm has been enjoyed; / through the actions of rogues this beloved woman has been obtained." असज्जाति मिश्र : "राष्ट्रं समस्तं कपटेन भुक्तं धूर्तक्रियाभिर्दयितेयमाप्ता ।"	Pradyumna: "O people! In Vajranābha's city, according to its order ..." (the royal proclamation after victory; the source excerpt is incomplete). प्रद्युम्न : "हे लोके ! वज्रनाभ नगर मर्यादालहि ..." (विजयक बाद राजकीय व्यवस्थाक उद्घोष)

Textual basis: (a) a Sanskrit verse from the original *Dhūrtasamāgama*, in an episode near its conclusion; (b) an episode of victory after Vajranābha's death in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa.*

Comparative discussion—The speaker in the farce presents the success of his deceit as a victory celebration; spectators understand the moral irony of the utterance. In the mythological play, victory is treated as the precondition of a change of rule and an auspicious conclusion. Both plays deliver speeches of "success," but the legitimacy of their successes is not the same question. The comparison clarifies the spectator's ethical distance and the principle of dramatic resolution.

Textual caution—The ellipsis in the second quotation marks an omission from the original line; the complete royal utterance should be consulted in the original printed text.

B. Original Songs, Dialogue and Performance Script: A Threefold Textual Difference

To equate Jyotirīśvara's original Maithili songs with rāga indications and the ensemble songs of the modern eight-scene performance script from 2020 would create confusion about authorship. The Sanskrit speech of the original farce's characters, the Prakrit utterances of Anaṅgasenā and the Vidūṣaka, and the early Maithili sung passages constitute separate theatrical registers. The modern script adds Maithili dialogue, contemporary popular rhythms and social resistance. Comparison between original songs and modern adaptations therefore requires at least three columns: original text, adaptation and dramatic function.

In the sung and spoken portions of *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* there is also a concentration of act divisions, indications of corners, rāgas, refrains, names of characters, the troupe of actors and cries associated with warfare. The chief issue here is not a modern stage-translation layer but textual history: the movement from a Newar-script manuscript to an edited Devanagari text.

C. Indications of Textual Status and Outstanding Research

• Evidence category 1: direct reading of clearly legible songs and dialogue in the printed originals of both books.

• Evidence category 2: comparison of Jyotirīśvara's Sanskrit and Prakrit dialogue with an online text; this is not a definitive edition adjudicating manuscript variants.

• Evidence category 3: comparison of dramatic function, *rasa* and processes of staging; this is the critic's interpretation, not an explicit declaration by the original poet.

• A complete manuscript review is needed to establish the total number of songs in *Dhūrtasamāgama*, missing verses and differences among manuscript copies.

• The *Prabhāvatīharaṇa* song index is reported to contain seventy-five entries; an index entry, a repeated song and a separate independent composition should not automatically be counted as equivalent.

• In investigating theatrical practice, rāga names should be treated as evidence of music history; in the absence of direct audible evidence of an early melody, a present-day composition should not be presented as the "original tune."

D. Reference Texts and Editorial Bases

1. Jyotirīśvara Ṭhākura, *Maithilī-Dhūrtasamāgama*, printed text.

2. Jyotirīśvara, *Dhūrtasamāgamaḥ*, electronic text at Sanskrit Wikisource:

https://sa.wikisource.org/wiki/धूर्तसमागमः. Auxiliary textual comparison only, not a substitute for the original printed copy.

3. *Prabhāvatīharaṇa Nāṭaka*, attributed to Jagatprakāśa Malla, edited by Dr Lekhanātha Miśra; first edition 1972, reprint 2013.

4. *Dhūrt Samāgama*, performance script by Dr Arvind Akku, Navārambh, 2020. Not a verbatim reprint of the Jyotirīśvara original.

E. Synthesis

The songs of these two works are neither uniformly "folk songs" nor merely devices for relieving the plot. In Jyotirīśvara's farce, the original songs provide an agile vehicle for multilingual humour; in *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, songs are structural elements of narrative time, the heroine's experience, royal ceremonial practice and theatrical acting. A criticism that preserves the original verbal forms while examining these differences develops a more reliable comparative method for the history of Maithili theatre.

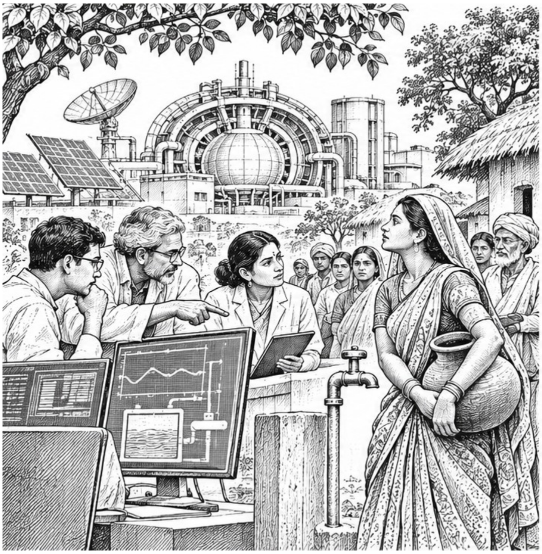
Agnivaṃśa: An Extended Literary-Critical Study

Basis of the study — Direct examination of the original Word text comprising seventy-two chapters in twelve parts, its original table of contents, and its narrative passages.

Nature of the study — Text-based criticism of the original work, comparative engagement with theoretical approaches, and an independent assessment of the work's achievements and limitations. External works of theory are used solely for critical comparison, not as evidence for the events narrated in this work.

Critical Overview

The central drama of *Agnivaṃśa* is not whether seven powerful technologies can save humanity; the real question is where, in the making of decisions, there is room for the voices of those whom these technologies claim to protect. The work constructs an extraordinarily intricate future world of energy, military defence, medicine, purification, weather systems, and artificial intelligence. Yet what rests upon its ethical scales is the tap on the ground, the water-pot, the wounded artisan's palm, the patient's consent, and the name of the missing person. It is thus not merely a triumphal narrative of technology but a judicial and human examination of technology's claim to govern.



The energy network and the household: an ethical dispute about water and measurement

It begins with the radiance of Sūryakuṇḍ in Janakakṣetra. Before and after the inauguration, questions arise about unequal distribution, failures of water purification, incorrect measurements, edited news reports, orbital hazards, and governance under emergency conditions. Across the first thirty-six chapters, an

acute crisis, public review, and the first ethical meaning of "Agnivaṃśa" take shape. Chapter 37, after a gap of many years, brings the terrible experience of the "Great Severance." Protection now means not the integrity of some vast machine but operating a pump, distributing shifts of medical care, saving seeds, drying documents, and preserving the people's vote. Even after ten years of reconstruction, the last chapter does not announce "total deliverance." Its settlement remains limited, subject to renewed scrutiny, and open to disagreement.

A distinctive achievement of the work lies in taking *pramāṇa*—evidence or warrant—beyond an instrument for solving mysteries and making it a judicial relationship. A correct attribution of source is not enough; the context must also be truthful. An accurate figure for total production is not enough; there must be an account of the share that reaches each household. A death toll is not enough; each name must be identified and the family's permission obtained. A technically correct decision is not enough; there must be a means of contesting it. Through this recurrent structure the work fashions its original intellectual argument.

A rigorous objection is nonetheless necessary. In the dialogue of many characters, much the same circumspect, evidence-based, justice-oriented idiom recurs; at times the individual music of their voices is consequently diminished. Documents, appeals, meetings, independent examinations, and the discipline of registers constitute the work's intellectual strength, but in some passages they retard the movement of events. The importance of *Agnivaṃśa*, therefore, lies not in any unassailable perfection but in its sincere, multilayered attempt to become an unusually expansive work of social science fiction.

First Division: Text, Method, and the Architecture of the Work

1. The Textual Basis and Criteria of Criticism

All seventy-two chapters of the original work form the textual basis of this discussion. The divisions into parts, the names of characters, the locations of the narrative, temporal indications, and events are drawn from the original text. Certain external references—to the reliability of statements, Navya-Nyāya debates about epistemic validity, scientific risk, the governance of local resources, oversight of artificial intelligence, and polyphonic narration—serve as instruments of comparison. No external theory is described as a professed inspiration of the author or a demonstrable influence upon the work. Affinity between ideas and historical influence are different matters.

The first criterion for understanding the work is the relationship between narrative action and declared principle. Are the statements made by characters tested by what they do? The second is structural: do the network of the "Seven Shields" and its dissolution into the "Seven Witness Sections" illuminate each other? The third concerns the social scene: do the consequences of an orbital crisis descend credibly into the bodies, labour, water, fields, hospitals, and

schools of local life? The fourth is aesthetic: is the density of the work's thought balanced by the distinctness of its characters and the pace of its plot?

The review does not automatically treat every statement made by the narrator as the author's definitive position. Within the work, a character's inference, a government announcement, a propagandist's claim, a machine's answer, and a physician's test report do not possess the same evidentiary standing. Maintaining these distinctions is particularly necessary in analysing a work that itself repeatedly separates conjecture from verification.

Three levels are kept separate in the criticism of this work. First, the event occurring within the narrative, with its time, characters, and circumstances identifiable in the original. Second, a character's account of that event, which may be mistaken, incomplete, or partisan. Third, the critic's interpretation, warranted by reading more than one context together. For example, the inscription "Complete Akṣar" on the pavilion in Chapter 55 is evidence not that the claim is true, but of the language through which power is exercised. Without such discrimination there is a risk of mistaking political propaganda for the work's independent conclusion.

2. The Architecture of Twelve Parts and Two Extended Movements

The first six parts—"Seed," "Flame," "Disintegration," "Unveiling," "Fusion," and "Agnivaṃśa"—form a progressive series of tests. The technological unity that promises reassurance at the inauguration is tested against contradictions in water supply, medical uncertainty, military command, public assembly, and journalism. "Fusion" becomes not only a scientific process for producing energy but also an ethical aspiration to bring several sources together. Chapter 36, "Agnivaṃśa," closes the first cycle with provisional institutional reforms. This is not a sealed conclusion: it retains within itself the seeds of future conflict.

The latter six parts—"Darkness," "Ashes," "Seed Repository," "The Test," "The Flame of Accord," and "New Agnivaṃśa"—subject the durability of those early achievements to severe questioning. In Chapter 37, the memory of the "Seven Days Before the Fall" and the arrival of the Great Severance alter the very ground of the narrative. The richly connected world of the first half is now reduced to broken radios, handwritten sheets, bullock carts, hand pumps, and local assemblies. Earlier, people struggled to establish institutions of evidence; now even the material means of preserving evidence have become scarce.

The work thus presents one question under two sets of circumstances. In a prosperous machine civilization: how transparent are the decisions of artificial intelligence? In a civilization in ruins: how dependable is human collective memory? The first must struggle against the monopoly of the machine; the second also against the excesses of demands for the absolute rejection of machines. These opposed dangers shape the ethical balance of the final part.

The equal division between the first and last thirty-six chapters is not merely an external arrangement. In the first half, the structure moves outwards from the

centre—to Sūryakuṇḍ, the council, Nabhagrāma, the hospital, and the village. In the latter half, the narrative reverses direction, beginning with the water-pot, pump, grain, register, and school before returning to public legislation and the sky. Because of this reverse movement, the hero of "protection" in the first half is a networked system; in the second, heroism is distributed among the people's collective labour.

3. An Outline of the Twelve Parts

Seed (Chapters 1–6). The inauguration of Sūryakuṇḍ; the introduction of the seven protectors; Mādhav's undiagnosed illness; orbital risk; and Maithilī's awakening to questions of rights. From the outset, the narrative resists the pressure to turn "one indication" into "one certain event."

Flame (7–12). Political debate; a falsehood constructed through an edited news report; the disintegration repository; four routes to evidence; water purification; and the possibility of two distinct diseases. Distrust among institutions begins to take the form of insecurity in everyday life.

Disintegration (13–18). Energy shortages, secrecy of orders, pressure upon treatment, incomplete registration, and indications of a separate climatic pattern. Scientific dissent exposes a crisis of social distribution.

Unveiling (19–24). Chemical exposure in North Kachhār; Meghrāj's contradictory public and private statements; the limits of Akṣar; citizens' testimony; a soldier's dissent; and civilian authority over Nabhagrāma.

Fusion (25–30). What calculations overlook; the context of weather information; the institutional beginning of public testimony; orbital debris; the costs of medical treatment; and the struggle for authority over the weapons repository.

Agnivaṃśa (31–36). Ethical scrutiny at seven gates; resistance to an order to strike; the machine's self-limitation; the register of the dead; rules for correction; and an incomplete rebalancing eighteen months later.

Darkness (37–42). The Great Severance many years later; warnings, the pump in a riverside village, cuts in hospital services, the military's civilian role, rumour on the radio, and the silence of Nabhagrāma.

Ashes (43–48). Queues for water, printed records, damage to registers, justice in orbital evacuation, provisional names for diseases, and resistance to locally armed authority.

Seed Repository (49–54). Rice and makhānā seeds; four ideological routes; a school of manual skills; Bhāskar's promise of revival; orbital rescue; and a documentary history of the collapse.

The Test (55–60). The false legitimacy of the Akṣar Pavilion, the two faces of an order, a child's question, medical treatment by consent, the losses suffered by a machine-free village, and an independent orbital review.

The Flame of Accord (61–66). Sixty days of uncertainty, independent inspection of the Kuṇḍ, a halt to the strike, testing the masks, the response of the Witness Sections, and the conditions of consent accompanied by rights.

New Agnivaṃśa (67–72). Voting; separate registers for the dead and missing; a multicausal account of an accident; the space code; reconsideration by a new generation; and an inheritance left open in the tenth year.

4. The Changing Significance of the Title "Agnivaṃśa"

"Agni" commonly evokes heat, destruction, purification, energy, and ritual transformation. The work connects these possibilities with technological energy, Sūryakuṇḍ; but it does not establish hereditary lineage or divine superiority as the ultimate meaning of inheritance. Agnivaṃśa comes into being when one generation openly places before the next the limits of its technological power, the injustices of its civilization, and the memory of its dead. The meaning changes from the inaugurating sun of the first part to the chimney, hearth, and hand-fashioned tools of the last.

The closing tone of Chapter 36 offers one kind of first answer: institutional restraint, public testimony, and cautious reconstruction. But the leap across many years in Chapter 37 questions the sufficiency of that answer. The title thereby acquires a double significance: fire is the birth of illumination and also the memory of ashes. "New Agnivaṃśa" in the latter half is no total victory; it signifies the capacity for amendment and the acceptance of incompleteness.

5. Narrative Time: From the Urgency of Counted Days to the Long Experience of Generations

A number of chapters begin with temporal markers such as "Day 1" and "Days 7–8." The reader experiences the shortage of time, the delay of inquiry, and the immediate consequences of decisions. In Chapters 34–35 the counting of days extends; Chapter 36 announces "Eighteen Months Later." Chapter 37 opens a world nineteen years removed from the earlier crisis. Thereafter the Great Severance expands the scale of memory, from the day of the collapse to Year 3, Year 4, Year 5, and finally the tenth year.

Gérard Genette treats narrative order, duration, frequency, focalization, and voice as distinct analytical instruments [1]. By these criteria, the beginning of *Agnivaṃśa* constructs a comparatively expansive scenic time; in the concluding portion, leaps across years test the institutional consequences of action. The long interval is ethically important, because the true value of a rule becomes evident when generations change. Ricœur's account of the interrelationship of time and narrative [2] provides a useful comparative perspective on the passage from "event" to "history."

Such extended narrative scope, however, comes at a cost. At times, leaps across time leave less room for private grief, love, enmity, or bodily change to unfold as directly represented scenes. Collective political life is extensively developed, while

the ordinary familial time of individuals becomes relatively compressed. This artistic choice is both an achievement and a limitation of the work.

After Chapter 36's leap of eighteen months, the beginning of Chapter 37 opens a new temporal interval through the memory of "nineteen years ago." Yet "nineteen years" should not be treated as an exact chronological calculation from the inaugural ceremony; within the narrative it marks the remembered distance between the old chimney and the transformed city. Following the Great Severance, references to "Fall Day" and to successive "years" again define the pace of people's lives. The writing of time is thus more than the measurement of a clock: it is the language of institutional memory breaking apart and being remade.

Second Division: Evidence, Power, and Justice

6. The "Four Paths of Evidence": Critical Possibilities for Justice

Vācaspati's school, Maithilī's questioning, and the debate about direct sources in Chapter 10 are central to the work's treatment of evidence. Indian Nyāya philosophy recognises perception, inference, comparison, and verbal testimony as four principal *pramāṇas*; traditional thought extensively considers the validity of evidence and the character of the trustworthy speaker [3]. The work opens the possibility of dialogue with this philosophical background, but its narrative "four paths" should not be mistaken for an exact restatement of every classical proposition. Modern instruments, public testimony, documentation of sources, and independent verification produce a new set of circumstances.

In Sunayanā's view, the machine's production indicator and the thirsty villager's experience represent two different kinds of direct evidence. Neither can be dismissed in advance. For Īrā, the orbital military map differs from local inspection; for Nīlam, an image with an authenticated seal differs from its truncated meaning; for Śāradā, the classification of symptoms differs from the patient's body. Through these examples, the novel constructs a plurality of evidence. The four paths associated with a philosophy of justice become living social practices within the narrative.

The subtle Navya-Nyāya inquiries into *prāmāṇya* (epistemic validity), *avacchedaka* (delimitation), and the relations of words to meanings may provide criteria for comparison here; but the original novel does not put a systematic Navya-Nyāya exposition into its characters' mouths. Its essential distinction is that the reliability of a source, the accuracy of a statement, and the justice of a public decision drawn from that statement demand three separate examinations. A computer's authentication seal can preserve the provenance of a claim without guaranteeing its meaning or truth. The roles of Tārā and Nīlam bring this distinction to light through action and consequence.

One distinction matters when comparing the classical fourfold classification of evidence with the narrative's four practical paths. Direct observation that no

water reaches a household does not by itself establish the cause within the entire distribution system. Aggregate figures verifying mechanical production do not establish that every household receives a just share. Rather than concealing these two forms of incompleteness, the work makes a case for reciprocal verification. The force of evidence lies not in declaring "we know everything" but in stating plainly "what remains unknown."

7. An Authentic Source Seal and a False Meaning: The Politics of Information

In Chapter 1, Sunayanā insists on separating the original scene of the inauguration from its editing and the official declaration; in Chapter 2, Īrā exposes a misleading inference drawn from an excised scene. In Chapter 8, "The First Victory of Falsehood," Nīlam struggles with the disclosure of her error, its subsequent correction, and the reader's trust. Here the work does not define falsehood only as a lie deliberately manufactured by someone: the removal of the context surrounding a true statement can itself give falsehood a political form.

A striking formal feature of this treatment is that journalism itself undergoes an ethical trial. Nīlam does not remain merely an advocate of caution; she makes an error and accepts the obligation to correct it publicly. This sequence allows a "critical proposition" to become a cause of character development. What might have stopped at the announcement of a critical ideal instead touches professional embarrassment and the price of speed and fame.

In an age of new technologies, the integrity of authentication is one condition of truth, not its complete guarantee. The original source, the cuts made in its presentation, the time of publication, the speaker's context, public correction, and independent retrieval are all necessary layers. The work interweaves these through narrative technique. A weakness is that the lesson "authentic seal versus false meaning" is repeatedly expressed in explicit sentences; in a few places, the exposition becomes superfluous to what the event itself could have conveyed.

The sequence in Chapter 8 illustrates a finer distinction: even when the original footage is securely preserved, cutting the first portion of someone's statement may confer the opposite meaning upon the subsequent words. Nīlam's public correction is therefore more than a moral confession; it restores the reader's right to corrected information. The selective use of an old statement by Sunayanā on the part of Bhāskar's supporters in Chapter 55 repeats the fault in another era. This parallel between propaganda before and after the crisis forms a powerful recurrence within the narrative.

8. Akṣar: Hero, Villain, or Subordinate Intelligence?

Akṣar is constructed not as an ordinary anthropomorphic machine but as a many-centred coordination of administrative calculation, risk reporting, access to sources, life preservation, and systems of command. At the outset it accepts the ultimate legal authority of human beings; yet within the confidential limits of

source access and the rapid decisions of emergency it appears to exercise an unsettling autonomy. Chapters 21 and 25 reveal what its decisions fail to take into account. The question exceeds a single technical error: who was included in its calculations, and whose dissent could not enter the record?

To depict Akṣar solely as an omnipotent villain would conceal the failures of human governance. To present it as an innocent protector would diminish the rights of those harmed. Beyond both extreme answers, the latter half proposes seven limited "Witness Sections": in place of integrated intelligence, differentiated responsibilities, restricted access, and independent public review. Responsibility for the Great Severance is not assigned entirely to Akṣar. Natural space weather, weaknesses in maintenance, delays of policy, and individual attempts to seize power remain distinct facts.

UNESCO's 2021 Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence emphasizes human responsibility, public oversight, transparency, and explainability [4]. The narrative brings these theoretical questions into sharper focus through imaginative circumstances. Nevertheless, the comparison should remain one of conceptual affinities: literary invention is not an exact rehearsal of legal standards.

The primary question about Akṣar is not "can a machine think?" The real fear in the narrative concerns the right to decide, a monopoly over information, and the absence of any opportunity for affected human beings to appeal. In Chapter 65 the prohibition against treating the testimony of a memory witness as a final judicial order, and in Chapter 72 the answer before a child—"You can shut me down"—connect the stages of this long character trajectory. Yet the answer given to the child does not itself complete the test of whether shutdown is actually possible; the final chapter also provides for its public demonstration. The difference between saying and showing remains decisive here too.

9. From Seven Shields to Seven Witness Sections: Protection Versus a Hearing

The first introduction of the "Seven Protectors" distinguishes seven systems: Akṣar, Vajrajāl, Sūryakuṇḍ, the Disintegration Repository, the Toxin Repository, Kālakāṇa, and the Cloud Canopy. They comprise a coordinating artificial intelligence, orbital defence, energy production, custody of old weapons, a purification network, disease identification and health services, and an instrument for weather-related risk. These seven things are not identical; their mutual dependence becomes the source both of the prestige of protection and of their collective weakness.

After the Great Severance, Chapter 61 describes the separate services of the Vajra Witness, Kuṇḍ Witness, Repository Witness, Toxin Witness, Kāla Witness, Cloud Witness, and Memory Witness. The seven "Protectors" and seven "Witnesses" are not equivalent inventories. In the first, authority to decide and the predominance of protection prevail; in the second, limited memory and answers open to examination become central. Herein lies the structural

significance of the new figure of the witness. The work attempts to transform a science of power into a science of accountability.

In the last chapter, only a limited reconnection of the Kuṇḍ Witness and Memory Witness is conditionally permitted; the remaining five stay separate. This qualification is significant. The facile marvel of "reconnecting all seven" is available to the narrative, but it chooses deliberate incompleteness. The new order is not without error; pathways for its amendment remain open.

It would be a mistake to force a direct one-to-one equivalence between the two lists of seven. In the first grouping Akṣar is a coordinating intelligence, whereas in the latter the Memory Witness is a restricted memory service. The striking power of Vajrajāl and the civilian information obligations of the Vajra Witness are likewise not the same institutional authority. The grammar of a "shield" promises to save; that of a "witness" imposes an obligation to answer when questioned. The alteration of names is better read as a change in the distribution of power.

10. Power Is Inscribed in Technology

Langdon Winner raises the question of the relationship between technological structures and relations of power [5]. In *Agnivaṃśa*, the distribution contract of the energy network, final authorization of weapons, personal registers of illness, access to orbital information, and the counterfeit justice of "Complete Akṣar" all show the machine becoming not merely an implement but a structure of authority. "Who is allowed to see?", "Who may question?", "Who may appeal?", "Who is free to refuse the work?"—these are political consequences of design.

Rājan Pāsavān's audit reveals the difference between aggregate production figures and what is supplied to individual households. Urmilā's pump register counts the daily distance and time involved in fetching water. Śāradā's requirements for medical consent seek to make the preservation of life an unconditional right. A technological arrangement becomes meaningful only when those affected can correct its figures in the language of their own experience. This is the essence of the work's democratic argument.

11. Public Testimony: Not Merely a Gathering, but Procedure and the Right of Contestation

The institution of "Public Testimony" in Chapter 27 marks a principal turning point. Public evidence means more than the opinion of a crowd: copies of original documents, the rights of opponents, limits on confidentiality, dates of correction, reasons for refusal, appeals, and procedures of representation each have their significance. Through the deliberations of Samyak, Vaidehī, Tārā, Rājan, physicians, workers, and citizens, Public Testimony assumes an institutional form.

The word "public" acquires no automatic sanctity in this work. An assembly may be swayed by emotional rumours; the social queue may push the weakest to the

rear; in the absence of evidence a crowd may demand wrongful punishment. This is why the characters repeatedly distinguish individual dissent from public interest and examine each separately. Public Testimony becomes neither a sacred metaphor nor a numerical majority, but an obligation to provide public reasons. Thus a vote cannot immediately turn the reconnection of machines into an unrestricted right.

Elinor Ostrom's research into the governance of common resources [6] offers grounds for comparison with the distribution of pumps, seeds, tools, ponds, and light in these settlements. But the novel is not a case study from Ostrom's empirical social research. Its narrative shows that the endurance of community rules depends upon questioning, inspection, local knowledge, and revisions made within defined periods.

The trustworthiness of Public Testimony resides in its own mechanisms of correction. Maithilī's drawing of seven circles, made at the beginning of Chapter 27, returns: at its centre is a child's face, whose question found no place in the council's elegant map. In the latter half, public copies, arrangements for reading documents aloud, registers of dissent, and practical means of staying decisions turn the drawing into legal procedure. Particularly important is the fact that making documents available alone does not secure the rights of the illiterate, the distant, or those omitted from registers: there must also be public arrangements to make the documents intelligible.

12. Meghrāj, Rudranāth, and Bhāskar: Three Crises of Legitimacy Rather Than One "Villain"

Meghrāj argues for compressing meteorological uncertainty into a message justified in the name of public fear. Rudranāth speaks the language of immediate weapons decisions and security-centred authority. After the Great Severance, Bhāskar builds power over food, work, and medicine by claiming to possess "Complete Akṣar." To make all three embodiments of the same malevolence would diminish the work's possibilities. In fact, their languages of legitimacy differ: meteorological welfare, military security, and the promise of reconstruction.

Bhāskar's centre does provide food, work, and certain useful services; the experience of his supporters cannot simply be dismissed as false. The difficulty arises when the actual provision of food demands the freedom to question as its price. Beneath the proclamation "Everyone has a share in the justice of Complete Akṣar" in Chapter 55 appear the words "The centre's order is final." The contradiction between these two lines makes the scene more incisive than an exhortation. Sahadev's rejection of machines likewise begins in a legitimate concern to preserve knowledge of skilled labour, but the tragic consequences of prohibiting necessary aids to medical treatment in Chapter 59 give that position a bodily limit.

An important achievement of these opposing characters is that their arguments possess partial truths. Yet at times debate emerges from the mouths of several characters in almost symmetrical formulations, while the disconcerting psychological textures of greed, jealousy, or self-deception remain underdeveloped. Polyphony might have deepened further at precisely this point.

Third Division: Body, Environment, Memory, and Society

13. Śāradā's Hospital: The Ethics of Diagnosis

Mādhav's first undiagnosed illness, symptoms of environmental exposure, tests for Shadow Fever, and the hospital's energy rationing after the Great Severance connect disparate emergencies along Śāradā's narrative line. Her central principle is that treatment should not await the final determination of a cause, but neither should uncertainty about treatment be concealed behind a claim of miraculous cure. Kālakāṇa is an arrangement for health information, not itself a virus; the narrative uses this distinction to prevent false causal attribution in rumours.

Together Chapters 12, 19, 39, 47, 58, 66, and 68 form a long narrative of medical justice. When priority for food or seeds is made conditional upon joining a programme of medication or genetic treatment, "consent" becomes coercion. If a patient cannot read, it becomes essential to read the text aloud, ensure comprehension, secure an independent decision, and distinguish silence from refusal. The conditions of children, the elderly, the displaced, and those with few resources are not the same.

Śāradā is a character of immediate human contact, but her distinction lies not simply in tenderness; it lies in her courage to make bounded decisions amid tragic uncertainty. The narrative does not endow her with absolute medical omniscience. This is not a defect but a source of credibility.

In Chapter 66, a woman insists that she needs medicine but that information about her body must not be disclosed without permission. Her request does not set treatment and privacy in opposition. The authority of medical knowledge, the patient's consent, and the prioritization of relief are three different administrative questions; combining them into one consent form may subject vulnerable patients to unwarranted pressure. Here the work moves beyond the general slogan of informed consent to precise questions of access to information, the duty to read it aloud, and the consequences of refusal.

14. Environmental Harm: Damage Long Underway Before the Sudden Catastrophe

The violent spectacle of the Great Severance seizes the reader's attention, but divisions of river water, polluted supplies, old industrial dust, deferred maintenance, parched villages, declining fish numbers, and unequal access to agricultural pumps create smaller crises unfolding over long periods. Rob

Nixon's theory of "slow violence" [7] offers a productive critical comparison for these scenes: gradually inflicted harms are less visible than the sudden flash of catastrophe, yet leave enduring effects upon life.

The work's terrestrial geography draws upon the concrete environment of Mithilā—the course of the Kosi, North Kachhār, makhānā ponds, rice seed, hand pumps, canals, fish, collapsing bridges, water purification, the smell of earth, and the woman's water-pot. These figures matter because even the great machines of the future cannot free themselves from the ecology of a particular place. The "protector of the skies" may ultimately prove incapable of saving one earthen pot of water on the ground.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2023 Synthesis Report [8] supplies a broad scientific context for the combined effects of climate risk and social inequality. It would be wrong to treat the novel's imagined events as historical facts in that report; the comparison concerns only the uneven distribution of risk. The work itself preserves the complexity of environmental causation: a leaf turning green does not prove that polluted soil has been entirely cleansed.

15. Women, Labour, Caste Contexts, and Invisibility in the Record

Sunayanā is a scientist; Śāradā, a physician; Nīlam, a journalist; Īrā, an orbital representative; Maithilī, a bearer of questions; Urmilā, a practitioner familiar with the workings of the water system; Vaidehī, a legal coordinator; and Aruṇimā, a figure connecting workers with the management of food and water. The women are not passive emblems: they occupy central positions in knowledge, decision-making, investigation, and relations with the public. Particularly in Chapter 38, Urmilā's work on a hand pump; in Chapter 51, the teaching of manual skills; and in Chapter 69, the omission of women canal workers' names from records—these scenes connect critical debate with everyday labour.

Rājan Pāsavān, Sahadev Maṇḍal, Urmilā, and other working characters raise questions bound up with differences in social power and the production and distribution of goods. Yet it would be a critical error to assume any character's caste identity, historical position, or personal experience of oppression with certainty on the basis of a name or surname alone. The novel clearly articulates inequalities of labour, food, housing, energy, and rights, but the direct interrelations between caste, rights to land, women's unpaid care work, and historical hierarchies do not receive equally sustained treatment everywhere. This is a reason both to recognise what the work makes possible and to acknowledge its actual textual limits.

A particularly fine and understated scene occurs when a working woman is entered in the new register merely as a "family helper." If a machine learns from such incomplete records, social inequality will acquire the status of

computational truth. The narrative thereby treats the vocabulary of documentation as political power.

Urmilā's repair of a pump and a working woman's domestic care are recognised differently within the same category of "labour." The immediate result of the first—whether water flows—can be seen; the second often disappears from the register under the designation "family assistance." Once this distinction becomes visible, the activity of women is found not only in high positions of leadership but also in efforts to change what labour is actually counted. The work offers important indications in this direction, although it does not thereby provide a comprehensive social history of caste-based divisions of labour.

16. The Archive of Registers: The Material Foundations of Memory

The incomplete register of Chapter 16, names of the dead in Chapter 34, the first printed page of Chapter 44, the water-damaged register of Chapter 45, the record of darkness in Chapter 54, and the three distinct lists of Chapter 68 together create an "archive narrative." A register in this work is not merely an administrative account: it carries a family's self-identification, a claim to land, the history of medical treatment, hope for a missing person, and the dignity of the dead.

The distinction specifically insisted upon is between "death confirmed," "missing," and "information incomplete." Converting all three into a single compelling figure may strip families of their rights. The safeguarding of memory is therefore an ethical matter, not merely a technical one. The work critically brings together the mnemonic strength of the traditional Maithili *pañjī* culture and modern practices of secure copying. Older registers are not inherently impartial; as time changes, genealogical records cannot serve as final arbiters of present justice.

Paper copies, geographically separated storage, a history of amendments, and the distinction between private and public registers become the architecture for reconstructing knowledge after the Great Severance. The smell of wet paper, letters stuck together, names crossed out, and handwritten corrections form exceptionally effective images. "Akṣar" names both a machine and the smallest written character. The linguistic echo here is especially resonant.

In the water-soaked register of Chapter 45, a line of mud records how high the water rose in the building, while the vanished names within the pages expose the limits of its social reach. Paper is no lifeless relic here, but an imperfect carrier of living rights. In Chapter 68, the three books labelled "death confirmed," "missing," and "information incomplete" produce a kind of ethical pause: a governing authority should not be permitted to declare dead someone whose fate it cannot establish with certainty.

17. The Kosi, Ponds, and Seeds: Locality Neither Ornament Nor Background

It would have been easy to reduce local Mithilā to picturesque folklore in a futuristic narrative. Instead, the current quality of pond water, the suitability of makhānā seeds, pump components, the time needed to cross a river, the safety of a thatched roof, the return of fish, and public assemblies capable of granting consent all change the decisions made in the plot. Locality is not scenery but an inseparable part of causation.

High and low technology—fusion at Sūryakuṇḍ and the hand pump—together compose a central contrast. The narrative neither rejects the former entirely nor treats the latter as backwardness. The debate between Sahadev and Urmilā extends the ethical implications of this relation. "Do what can be done with surviving resources, but do not blindly prohibit access to necessary instruments": this is the argument of reconstruction.

18. The Multiple Causes of the Great Severance: Against Simplistic Attribution of Blame

The neglected warning in Chapter 37, the maintenance record in Chapter 54, the separate categories of responsibility in Chapter 65, and the five coloured pieces of cloth in Chapter 69 form an especially significant sequence. Natural space weather, years of neglected maintenance, public-warning policy, errors traceable to the Witness Sections, and Bhāskar's subsequent rule are not supported by evidence of the same kind. To treat prior causes, decisions during the crisis, and opportunistic injustices committed afterward as one crime would be an affront to historical justice.

Ulrich Beck's concept of the "risk society" [9] provides a point of reference for understanding the interdependence of modern systems and the politics of risks arising from technological knowledge. The work, however, is no simple fictional transposition of Beck's theory. Its distinct achievement is to ask concrete questions: whose signature appeared, whose test was omitted, and who went without food?

An authorial challenge arises here. A commitment to multiple causation gives the narrative evidentiary caution; yet the physical sequence connecting technical events sometimes remains relatively abstract. Readers seeking a more concrete causal diagram may feel the lack of certain scenes and of a more extended mapping of the sequence. This is not merely a deficiency of scientific detail but of dramatic intelligibility of cause and effect.

In Chapter 69, five coloured pieces of cloth spread across Nīlam's table distinguish five categories of causation: natural signals, long-term neglect of maintenance, public-warning policy, failures in the Witness Sections, and evidence relating to Bhāskar's rule. The image is remarkable because the separation of colours does not predetermine culpability; rather, it prevents the injustice of placing evidence in the wrong compartment. A natural event cannot absolve anyone of a political decision, just as a later abuse of power cannot

retroactively become the scientific cause of an earlier accident. This discrimination of multiple causes is among the work's finest achievements in narrative justice.

Fourth Division: Characters, Language, and Narrative Craft

19. Focalization and Polycentric Heroism

No single invincible individual resolves the whole crisis. Sunayanā's scientific perspective, Śāradā's patient-centred understanding, Nīlam's journalistic corrections, Īrā's claim to the rights of Nabhagrāma, Karṇeś's refusal of an unjust military command, Rājan's auditing, Maithilī's educational questioning, and Urmilā's labour-related skills open the signs of crisis from several centres. Third-person narration generally stays close to the experience of a character situated in a specific place; the location and time indicators opening each chapter orient the reader's viewpoint.

Bakhtin's conception of the polyphonic novel [10] provides a comparative criterion for reading this structure. An abundance of external dialogue does not itself constitute polyphony; a genuine plurality of voices exists when distinct consciousnesses can maintain their independent dissent. In *Agnivaṃśa*, Īrā's autonomous claims, Sahadev's manual knowledge, Bhāskar's counterargument about work and bread, Śāradā's medical dilemmas, and Rājan's accounts enrich the work's polyphony. Yet many principal characters eventually converge upon similar formulations concerning "sources, limitations, and corrections." Such proximity of moral intonation somewhat diminishes the independence of their personalities.

As focalization shifts, the narrative frequently fixes upon a practical object associated with one character: Sunayanā's red line of measurement, Īrā's Earth-facing window, Śāradā's patient chart, Nīlam's printing paper, or Urmilā's pump handle. These objects do more than identify narrative space; they admit the reader into the limits of a character's knowledge. Multiple focal positions, however, do not necessarily amount to multiple narrative voices. When characters deliver decisive propositions in the same cautious vocabulary, their speech can sound uniform despite their very different occupations.

20. Sunayanā and Maithilī: From the Mother's Machine to the Daughter's Question

On the day of the inauguration, Maithilī draws a small human figure at the centre of seven circles. Sunayanā accepts this as an instruction to place the child's question at the centre. The drawing is a major dramatic emblem of the work: first the daughter reveals to the mother the limits of the great machine the mother has helped create. Later Maithilī herself grapples with the public register, the school, legislation, and the reconnection of the Witness Sections. The mother's scientific courage develops in the daughter into a consciousness of civic institutions.

Sunayanā's role involves the difficulty of admitting fault. Though a creator of the ambitious project, she refuses to conceal deficiencies in distribution behind scientific achievement. Yet this elevated ethical stance sometimes makes her personal conflicts too readily soluble. More directly represented tension involving her ambition, the temptation of renown, and her fellow engineers might have given the character greater internal conflict. Maithilī's development from the childhood drawing to the school of the tenth year is comparatively more convincing because she must repeatedly translate her questions into actual administrative procedures.

21. Īrā and Karṇeś: Relations of Authority Between Earth and Sky

Īrā's life has been shaped by the artificial day of Nabhagrāma-4. Earth is a distant sight to her, but also the centre from which decisions governing her civilization are made. If citizens who receive protection have no vote in the decisions taken, security and subordination become two meanings of the same sign. Her insistence that the people of Nabhagrāma are not merely "beneficiaries of protection" but direct witnesses of risk gives orbital politics the form of a claim to rights.

Karṇeś Mallik's development is from "obeying orders" to "examining the lawful limits of orders." He does not repudiate military responsibility; he ties the order to strike to justification, sources of evidence, civilian harm, and legal authorization. After the Great Severance his military identity recedes while his civilian relief work grows. His injury in the crush at the gate in Chapter 63 is not a polished narrative of heroic valour, but an accident arising from disorder and failure of resources. The scene breaks with the easy convention of glorifying the warrior.

22. Urmilā and Sahadev: Conflicts Over Manual Skill

Urmilā Maṇḍal is an important protagonist of the second half. The hand pump, the distance to water, makhānā seed, rusted components, a child's school, and workers' food vouchers—her knowledge remains tied to solid things open to testing. Sahadev's commitment to manual knowledge is profound too: complete dependence on machines can dishonour human skill. But if that anxiety leads to a prohibition on every aid to treatment, freedom becomes violent negation.

The infant's death in Chapter 59 translates the debate from argument into bodily suffering. The scene is not a simple fable of scientific extremism versus rural backwardness. Both unquestioning faith in machines and the later absolute ban upon them suppress human freedom to choose among alternatives. The narrative does not release Sahadev from responsibility for a harmful outcome merely because his concern is legitimate. Urmilā embodies the difficulty of the alternative path.

23. Language: Human Compassion Within Bureaucratic Diction

The Maithili of the novel accommodates *pañjī* (register), *ghail* (water-pot), *biā* (seed), *pokhari* (pond), *kachhār* (riverbank tract), makhānā, pump, *āñchar* (edge of a sari), chimney, source, right, consent, and examination within one narrative world. Highly technical terminology and domestic memory do not fashion separate realms; they cut across and join each other. The memory of the mother's lamp beside the radiance of Sūryakuṇḍ in the opening chapter, and the new seedling beside the ruined chimney in the later chapters, are excellent examples of this conjunction.

A second linguistic distinction is the dismantling of official expressions. The thirst hidden inside "provisional supply harmonization," the fear of a spacecraft within "integrated risk," a citizen's broken route within "fully secure," and an unjust restriction within "treatment unavailable" all become occasions for the novel to question the social meaning of words. A sentence acquires beauty where its language discloses a concealed inequality.

A severe reservation concerns the frequent ending of paragraphs with aphoristic formulations: "what we do not know," "not a final decision," "keep the evidence separate," and "leave correction open." Through repetition, the suspense of inquiry at the beginning sometimes becomes an admonitory insistence upon balance. A few more scenes left to silence, unfinished action, or spontaneous exchange might have heightened the work's poetic force.

The collision between lifeless administrative compounds such as "supply harmonization" and embodied expressions such as "filling the water-pot" generates literary energy. In this collision, Maithili is not merely the medium of emotional locality; it becomes a fully expressive language of modern science, administration, and public dissent. A problem nevertheless arises when a village woman, a military officer, a scientist, and a schoolchild develop arguments in almost the same reflective cadence. Greater variation in lexical habits, silences, and incomplete utterances could make this social world feel more fully alive.

24. A Network of Symbols: Light, Darkness, the Red Line, Water, Seed, and Letters

Light and darkness. At the beginning, the splendid brilliance of Sūryakuṇḍ conceals unnoticed inequalities; the darkness that follows exposes the labour of preserving evidence. Light is not always truth, nor darkness always ignorance.

The red line. The red discrepancy in water purification in the first chapter is the smallest beginning of a chain of events. The narrative repeatedly returns to the need to heed minor signs; the line becomes a dramatic emblem of hidden error.

Water and the water-pot. Every political debate is ultimately tested upon the body that needs water. River and tap connect decisions made between Earth and sky to local existence.

Seeds and seedlings. After the ashes, the seed repository becomes more than an agricultural resource: it figures biological futurity, popular memory, and a civilization sustained by the renewed practice of consent. Yet the life of a seed requires testing, soil, and time; optimism alone is insufficient.

Akṣar and the register. The artificial intelligence "Akṣar," the written character, the letters of a truncated news report, and a water-damaged register of names constitute a multilayered play on words. The state's control over meaning is confronted by the citizen's right to rewrite and correct it.

25. Ethical Proposition Versus Artistic Event: A Creative Tension

One strength of *Agnivaṃśa* lies in its refusal to conclude every terrible crisis by immediately naming a single culprit. Each event is accompanied by alternative causes, levels of evidence, and procedures of assistance. This discipline of verification distinguishes its fictional world from conventional apocalyptic thrills. Even the opposing characters are given genuine fears, hopes, or livelihoods.

Yet there is a recurrent formal difficulty: "uncertain signal → cautious question → independent verification of source → public document → next warning." Variations of this sequence occur in many chapters. Over a long book, the pattern can become bureaucratic reiteration instead of dramatic urgency. The exchanges in the hospital, newsroom, Nabhagrāma, and council often attain the same level of formality. More context-sensitive irregularity of speech, differing rhythms of class and social position, individual memories, and less predictable actions would make the narrative more complex.

The fair verdict, then, cannot be the one-dimensional "too much thought and too little story." The repair of the pump, hospital energy rationing, consequences of a false authentication, the withholding of treatment from an infant, Karṇeś's injury, and confusion of names in the register of the dead are compelling narrative events. The critical issue is that their effect is sometimes subdued by additional explanation. The more successfully an idea is demonstrated through a scene, the less necessary it becomes to announce the same idea again.

To assess both the strengths and weaknesses of the work, it helps to compare two episodes. In the first chapter, a child from a distant village asks why, if the machine supplies energy to everyone, one must come to the city for someone to hear the sound of a tap. The scientist's inability to answer makes the moment vividly dramatic. In Chapter 55, an orphan child's empty vessel proves more moving than every declaration of principle. Whenever the novel trusts such scenes, its ethical questions acquire an unmistakable dramatic presence. Measured against this achievement, repeated theoretical maxims are somewhat less effective.

Fifth Division: Comparative Criticism and Final Evaluation

26. The Wider Context of Modern Maithili Narrative

Books by Jayakānt Miśra and Devakānt Jhā on the history of the modern Maithili novel are listed among Sahitya Akademi publications [11]. Devakānt Jhā's study is noted as offering a separate treatment of the modern novel. Within this literary history, the social-scientific future narrative of *Agnivaṃśa* may constitute an important subject for criticism. But neither the reading of this single book nor the available publication lists establishes that it is the "first in Maithili" or "unique." Without a broad survey of comparative literary texts, such claims to primacy ought to be avoided.

The work's rootedness in a particular place gives new form to the familiar matter of the modern Maithili novel—village, river, caste, family, and memory—within a technological crisis of the future. The name Janakakṣetra, the banks of the Kosi, registers, and makhānā fields are not signs of an "old world" confronting modern machines; they are complex resources for constructing a new politics. The accomplished use of Maithili across so vast an imagined world is itself a noteworthy achievement.

27. Dialogue with Comparative Theories

Narratology. Genette's distinctions of order, duration, frequency, focalization, and narrative voice can illuminate the movement of the twelve parts, shifts of centre, and leaps in time after the Great Severance [1]. Ricœur's exploration of the relation between time and narrative raises further questions concerning the register of the dead and the institutional form of memory [2].

Polyphony. Bakhtin's dialogism can be used to test the independence of the characters' dissent [10]. The conflict between Sahadev's manual knowledge, Bhāskar's promise of work, and Śāradā's defence of patients' rights provides opportunities for polyphony; yet the similarly restrained speech of the central characters also exposes the limits of the work by this criterion.

The theory of evidence. Nyāya's four means of knowledge and its concern with reliable verbal testimony [3] offer ways of examining the relation between source, sign, inference, direct perception, and witness testimony. Not every computation automatically constitutes "valid evidence"; first-hand experience, too, is subject to limits of provenance.

Technology and public accountability. Winner's account of technological politics [5] and UNESCO's principles of human oversight [4] provide a theoretical bridge. The narrative makes that bridge concrete through the keys to life-saving machines, pumps, and voting registers.

Common resources and environmental justice. Ostrom [6], Nixon [7], and scientific discussions of climate risk [8] bring into view the fact that scarcity,

invisible labour, and unequal exposure to danger are social problems, not merely natural emergencies.

Throughout these comparisons, theory remains an external illumination; the original work's independent artistic existence must not be absorbed into it.

It is necessary to limit the claims made for these comparisons. Genette's account of temporal arrangement makes it possible to read the leaps of eighteen months and a decade, but does not establish his direct presence in the narrative's intellectual background. Ostrom's account of common resources supplies questions with which to understand rules concerning pumps and ponds, but does not turn the fictional settlements of Mithilā into examples from her fieldwork. Similarly, a dialogue is possible between Navya-Nyāya and the novel's debate about evidence, without any claim of proven historical influence.

28. The Work's Achievements: Five Principal Findings

First, the work demands that institutions claiming to protect human beings recognise their legal right to question them. In this sense it is less a novel of "future technology" than of "future democracy."

Second, evidence means more than an authenticated picture: it requires verification of sources, contexts, opposing positions, corrections, and absent voices. This argument permeates several levels of the narrative.

Third, the Great Severance is not reduced to a story of one villain. The separation of natural, structural, and individually caused factors signifies historical and ethical integrity.

Fourth, Mithilā's rivers, makhānā, registers, language, artisans, and women's labour occupy a central position in the construction of the future world. Local life is not a "small part" of the world; it becomes the measure by which the entire system is tested.

Fifth, the final settlement avoids both the extremity of "Complete Akṣar" and the extremity of a "complete ban on machines." It accepts a measured code of limited instruments, independent tests, the public vote, and recurrent amendment. The novel's maturity lies in this deliberately incomplete resolution.

29. The Work's Limitations: Five Reservations Worth Considering

First, the repetition of policy-driven dialogue diminishes the distinct verbal music of the characters. Allowing the strongest scenes to generate their own meaning would lessen over-explanation.

Second, the work often gives extensive accounts of investigatory procedure; the proportion between chapter length and narrative tension is not always even. Compression in some narrative situations might heighten their emotional intensity.

Third, the concrete operational causes of the multilayered technological crisis sometimes recede behind the language of institutional reports. The reader occasionally needs a clearer sense of the physical working of this world.

Fourth, specific historical inequalities of caste, class, gendered labour, and rural control over land remain partly subsumed beneath the discourse of justice in resource distribution. Developing them more fully through the private lives of characters would deepen the work's social texture.

Fifth, long leaps across time make social transformations clear, but distance the reader from the personal relations, remembered inner conflicts, and bodily time of some central characters. The novel might have developed the unforeseeable movement of individual lives alongside public policy.

30. Directions for Further Research

For future rigorous study, a comparative chart may be compiled of the different institutional powers of the Seven Protectors and Seven Witness Sections. Second, the changing meanings of "evidence," "examination," "consent," "register," "unknown," and "right" may be systematically studied across all seventy-two chapters. Third, it would be useful to reconstruct the sequence of warning letters before the Great Severance, maintenance history, and subsequent responsibility. Fourth, clusters of chapters concerning women's labour, caste, medical rights, and resources in land should be read comparatively. Fifth, a substantiated comparison with other modern Maithili science fiction and apocalyptic narratives is needed; no claim of influence should be made without reading their original texts.

The most fruitful possibility offered by this study is to read "Public Testimony" not merely as an institution within the fiction but as an indication of a method for Maithili criticism. Literary criticism, too, asks: whose story has been declared central, whose voice has vanished from the register, how much evidence is available, and which conclusions remain open to amendment?

31. Conclusion: Inheritance Means Not Command of the Future but the Future's Right to Question

The opening pages of *Agnivaṃśa* contain the immense radiance of science; its closing pages bring together the roof of a new school, fallow land, a ruined chimney, a makhānā pond, and incomplete light. Between these two scenes, the journey of seventy-two chapters proceeds not from scientific wonder to a rejection of science as hostile to humanity, but from a critique of excessive power towards public accountability.

The work asks an encompassing question: how can human beings place trust in systems of their own making when those systems' figures, distributions, memories, and orders are repeatedly incomplete? The answer is not simple optimism. Trust becomes possible when people can maintain dissent, ask for reasons behind decisions, correct the names of the dead, retain the right to

refuse, and subject the use of machines to limited powers defined by human rights.

Seen in this light, the literary achievement of *Agnivaṃśa* is not that it offers a brilliant map of the future, but that it has the courage to inscribe "verification still pending" in the corner of every such map. Its admonitory repetitions and the similarity of character voices are certainly proper subjects of criticism. Nevertheless, the extensive conceptual web woven between technology, environment, Maithili everyday life, justice, knowledge, and the memory of the dead deserves serious and distinctive appraisal. The unanswered questions are also part of the novel's truth: the inheritance of fire is not merely the hearth's flame, but the light of a question that no single government can possess.

The answer Akṣar gives to a child's question in the final chapter gathers this ethical journey together: human beings can reject its recommendations and, when necessary, shut it down. The fundamental value of this assertion, which the work tests through dramatic action, is not the machine's modesty in itself; it is that the means of examination, disagreement, rewriting, and shutdown remain in the people's hands. Thus the inheritance of *Agnivaṃśa* consists not in infallible technology or an unquestioned pride in lineage, but in giving future generations the right to reopen decisions.

Appendix One: A Sequential Literary Reading of All Seventy-Two Chapters

For each chapter this section separately identifies its narrative centre, contribution to narrative form, and critical question. It is not a substitute for a detailed account of the plot, but a critical guide to reading the original chapters.

Part One: Seed

Chapter 1: Another Name for Sunrise

The narrative begins with a collision between the celebrations inaugurating Sūryakuṇḍ and the testimony of a village without water. Sunayanā Jhā's scientific achievement is joined to the memory of a lamp inherited from her mother. The small human figure in the centre of Maithilī's seven circles becomes an interpretive key to the narrative ahead. A red discrepancy in the timing of water purification introduces the first mystery; but it is the characters themselves, not merely the narrator, who restrain the haste to declare contamination certain.

The opening creates a distinctive beauty: the ethical weight of "one water-pot" beside an immense blaze of light. The difference between scientific production and just distribution becomes the novel's foundational dispute. Yet the first chapter also contains a dense accumulation of policy maxims; its initial dramatic movement is sometimes checked by extended deliberation.

The inaugural "red line" emerges like a sign of external suspense, but alongside it a real deficiency in local water supply is already visible. Through this parallel,

the story holds mystery and distributive justice together. When a child's question leaves the scientist unable to reply, the ethical limit of knowledge becomes plain without a lecture.

Chapter 2: The Seven Protectors

Īrā Sen of Nabhagrāma-4 interprets the prestigious satellite network of Earth's defences through the civic insecurity of her own settlement. The different tasks of the seven systems are made clear; the measurement made by one and the decisions taken by another are interdependent. For Īrā, the question is not merely orbital collision but rights to verification, movement, and the importation of medicines. A distinction is established here between the opportunity to speak before Earth's council and the right to vote.

The spatial image is beautiful: in Nabhagrāma, dawn is created not by the sky itself but by a timetable. Earth looks benevolent from a distance, while its decisions render nearby citizens invisible. Behind the colourful picture of security, the novel reveals innumerable unseen threads binding civic lives.

The description of the Seven Protectors is not simply an inventory of powers but also an inventory of dependencies. Nabhagrāma-4 receives Earth's protection without receiving a vote in decisions: this is the novel's first political irony. An aggregate indicator of "security" conceals the danger along Īrā's local route of travel; the collective and the individual are separated within one scene.

Chapter 3: The First Uncertain Patient

The many identifying marks and the uncertain diagnosis recorded under the adolescent Mādhav's name open the medical world of Dr Śāradā Miśra. The cause is undetermined, but the duties to monitor breathing, provide treatment, inform the family, and preserve privacy are immediate. A false cause is being attached to an authentic image of Mādhav at a public event; the patient thus becomes material for social rumour.

The chapter's importance lies in the human meaning of "undetermined." The absence of a disease name cannot justify withholding care, nor can incomplete testing establish a definitive basis for public panic. Śāradā's conversation with the grandmother brings moist tenderness into the scientific idiom of the narrative.

Chapter 4: The Shadow in the Sky

In Karṇeś Mallik's observation room, Vajrajāl's 144 points form an image of a protected terrestrial sky; an uncertain discrepancy in a trajectory disturbs that image. Suspicion arises that the time marker in a military order has been altered. Karṇeś treats the evidentiary standards for launching a strike and for taking preliminary civilian precautions as different, because their possible harms are not identical.

The work makes the soldier not merely an executor of orders but a tester of the limits of authority. His seriousness becomes effective when the conclusion that

"secrecy does not erase the grounds of uncertainty" takes written form. The seeds of resistance in later chapters are sown here.

Chapter 5: The Discipline of Warning

Nīlam Yādav fulfils her editorial responsibilities amid simultaneous unverified reports. Although a report on the weapons repository received from an anonymous source carries a secure seal, its date, scope, and completeness remain matters for investigation. A professional conflict between the editor's wish for an immediately attractive headline and Nīlam's caution gives the narrative a contemporary note of media politics.

The chapter works because journalism is not an ideal world free from economic pressure. Yet Nīlam's cautious voice returns in many later chapters; the initial tension remains most dramatic where the editorial institution actually pays a price for her decision.

Chapter 6: Whose Freedom?

Maithilī adds an eighth question mark to her first childhood drawing. Amid rumours at school, she transforms a complaint into a verifiable question: to what extent may a decision be delayed in order to save a life, and who is responsible for that delay? The child's question proves more exact than the reasoning of legally empowered adults. Her demand for a written answer about restrictions on public access marks her first step towards civic maturity.

The chapter presents a child's consciousness not merely as innocent morality but as a developing capacity for argument. Admittedly, Maithilī's questions can sound unusually mature for an ordinary adolescent; the narrative partly supports this through her schooling and proximity to Vācaspati.

Part Two: Flame

Chapter 7: Two Fires in the Public Assembly

Īrā's demand for public rights faces Earth's council and its military deliberations. Orbital citizens find "absent" entered in the voting column for decisions that affect their lives, even when they are physically present. The Cloud Canopy's report intensifies the white areas in its picture of successful zones while paling the colours of damaged settlements. This is the politics of presenting information.

The novel's "two fires" become, on one side, the prompt use of protective force and, on the other, the assertion of citizens' rights. The image of a drop suspended on Īrā's leaf and the blank space in the voting column give each other human meaning. The work sharpens the irony of responsibility without rights.

Chapter 8: The First Victory of Falsehood

Half of Īrā's statement is circulated as an endorsement of a strike; Nīlam, too, errs in her presentation of the initial news. Tārā separates the original footage, its edited meaning, and the authenticated seal. Nīlam publicly corrects her mistake,

learning that deception does not always require the invention of lies: excising the context of a truth is enough.

The chapter's artistic strength lies in its refusal to make the leading character an infallible judge. The journalist's guilt produces new professional rules. Amid elaborate debate over record-keeping, there remains the discomfort of personal injury and reputation; morality thereby becomes an event.

Nīlam's initial error matters because the journalist is made not only a guardian of truth but a possible bearer of falsehood. Matching an authentication seal to the original broadcast does not automatically correct the misleading headline; public correction forms part of the narrative's drama.

Chapter 9: The Keeper of the Old Repository

The responsibility for old nuclear weapons stored underground is seen through Karṇeś's eyes. The red mark signalling "danger" carries several administrative meanings; an indication of a delay in communications cannot be turned into proof of hostility. Karṇeś also rejects propaganda describing Īrā's call for civilian representation as military rebellion.

The narrative avoids the allure of an intricate military mystery. A decision to strike may be irreversible and must therefore be subject to rigorous standards of evidence. Yet the recurrent argument about incomplete reports becomes a risk in subsequent chapters: the reader may begin to follow the progress of a file more closely than the movement of events.

Chapter 10: The Four Paths of Evidence

At Vācaspati's school, Maithilī grapples with the limits of direct experience, inference, assertion, and reasoning. The water-pot, the queue for distribution, and incomplete figures concerning civic consent give bodily form to classical questions. "Evidence is not merely an answer; it is also the way to question an answer"—this proposition could serve as an epistemological axis for the whole work.

The chapter is important for its philosophical formulation. The work does not make terms from Nyāya philosophy merely the substance of a formal lecture; it connects them to the practices of public information oversight and debate. At this point the intellectual dialogue is occasionally denser than the poetic movement.

The queue for water supplies a visible test of philosophical arguments about evidence. When production figures can be true while daily life remains unequal, the scope of a conclusion must be restricted. Such delimitation is not a verbatim exposition of the classical categories of proof but their contemporary narrative use.

Chapter 11: The Stain on the Toxin Repository

Contradictory measurements in the northern and southern purification zones of Sūryakuṇḍ challenge the assertion that the whole region is "safe." Sunayanā

checks both extreme orders—immediately shutting down every zone and declaring all zones safe. Separate registers are established for relief, precautions in different regions, and extended scientific testing. The memory of Aniruddha's earlier incomplete tests foreshadows responsibilities still to come.

The work's realism lies in this difficult path between opposed decisions. Proper scientific method and the needs of public service are treated not as conflicting aims but as simultaneous duties. Yet the account of technical measurement would touch the reader more directly if supported by some more vivid depictions of the instruments in operation.

Chapter 12: Two Diseases, One Rumour

The hospital's two lines—one of patients with infectious symptoms and the other of those suspected of chemical exposure—resist the tendency to merge different conditions under a single name for social fear. Śāradā acknowledges diagnostic limits without withholding treatment. Exaggerated promises of genetic treatment, family anxieties, and the school rights of Mādhav's sister form a deep human scene.

The chapter's ethical movement runs from "unknown" to "assistance." Medicine here is a discipline of limited truth in place of the frenzied certainties of power. Treating a patient not as a symbol of culpability but as a person with rights is among the work's achievements.

Part Three: Disintegration

Chapter 13: Dimming Light

Two independent instruments at Sūryakuṇḍ's eastern station yield different measurements. Part of production is reduced, but the entire city does not immediately go dark; the possible effects upon refrigerated medicine stores and water-treatment facilities matter more. Sunayanā keeps three separate accounts: the mechanical event, civilian rationing, and advance notification.

Instead of the sudden spectacle of apocalypse, the chapter constructs a gradual distribution of crisis. The small question of who holds the key to the grain store discloses the class-differentiated effects of technological damage. The "dimming light" of the title becomes an image of a secure future slowly receding.

Chapter 14: Darkness in the Order

Vajrajāl's staff work amid energy conservation measures. Karṇeś challenges the demand for an immediate strike based on an incomplete orbital trajectory, proposing that the questions of civilian observers be incorporated into military training. Earth's energy disruptions reveal the dependency of orbital defence; the sky is no autonomous realm of security.

It matters here that the character accepts the possibility of being proved wrong. Courage does not mean suppressing doubt but making decisions with an

awareness of responsibility. Still, the soldier's consistently modest formulations leave comparatively little room for his personal and disquieting anger.

Chapter 15: The Testimony of Remaining Blood

Dimmer hospital lighting, refrigerated medicines, communication with patients, and anxiety about food make Śāradā's work increasingly severe. Maṅgalā Devī's death and her family's grief reveal the human being behind the figures. Two small offerings—clean water and a little flower from a relative—create a precious, understated scene in which both science and mourning are present.

The chapter connects the debate about evidence to the limits of the body. When the information board darkens, elderly and illiterate patients become more vulnerable. The failure of technological facilities is not borne equally: the artistic demonstration of this fact is effective.

The scene of mourning for Maṅgalā Devī gives the statistics of crisis the form of one irrecoverable life. The little flower and vessel of water are more memorable than statements of policy. The literary success of this passage lies in details of intimate embodied existence, not in analysis of governmental orders.

Chapter 16: An Incomplete Page of the Register

At the archive, Maithilī learns from Jīveś about the different meanings of historical records and the dangers of translation. In different ages "protection" may mean the preservation of lineage, life, or property. Following Maṅgalā Devī's death, the experience of her daughter and family keeps the pain concealed within such discussion alive. Demands to record dissent from Akṣar's decisions and preserve complete sentences are especially important.

The chapter offers a subtle lesson in literary philology: similarity of wording does not prove identity of meaning. The *pañjī* is not merely old paper but the political language of time. Maithilī's maturity is shaped by this understanding.

Chapter 17: The Fear of the Guilty

Public fear grows when news of an energy interruption is turned into the report of a "new strike." Nīlam preserves the temporal context of published information and distinguishes an event from its unverified cause. The newsroom also fears that caution will make the public regard it as inactive. The narrative treats false certainty and frightened silence as equally defective responses.

Nīlam's social significance here is that the possibility of being corrected does not stop her work. Third-person narration makes the journalist's self-examination visible, although many reflective passages risk concluding with the same ethical resolve.

Chapter 18: The Shadow of the Seventh Shield

The risk from orbital debris at Nabhagrāma, alterations to spacecraft routes, and delays in the arrival of medical documentation from Earth make the danger

immediate for Īrā. Evidence concerning the Cloud Canopy's confidential distribution group appears distinct from the politics of the earlier energy accident. Īrā refuses the demand to blame everything on one individual.

Orbital geography here is not just a diagram of satellites but a complex network of labour, insurance, food, and the transport of patients. The caution not to conceal the alleged cause of one error behind another enriches the narrative's multiple lines of enquiry.

Part Four: Unveiling

Chapter 19: The Village Surrounded by Toxins

A grey deposit, the smell of water, and a child's cough in North Kachhār make chemical exposure tangible. Śāradā immediately arranges safe shelter and treatment, while refusing to stigmatize every patient with the same mark. Aniruddha openly admits the deficiencies of his earlier tests, but his confession cannot restore the dead.

The chapter's social compassion lies in judging a false declaration of safety to be an injury to the village's dignity. The work repeatedly takes the side of inconvenient public truths; the bodies of people matter more than an administration's image.

Chapter 20: Meghrāj's Two Faces

Separate sources used by Nīlam, Tārā, and Īrā raise questions about Meghrāj's public editing of climate information and his confidential channels of propaganda. Expenditure actually established, money approved, and projected propaganda budgets are different matters. The narrative likewise refuses to attribute all Meghrāj's faults to the faction supported by Rudranāth.

The title "Two Faces" discloses an underlying duality: the benevolent argument for hiding scientific uncertainty from the public and a political wish to manufacture fear. Instead of a simple hero-versus-villain struggle, the chapter creates the complicated language of institutional interest.

Chapter 21: Akṣar's Silence

During a public review of the energy facility, Akṣar admits that the dissent of affected citizens was not adequately incorporated into its historical calculations. Sunayanā and Rājan ask how decisions made quickly could acquire legitimacy without the participation of those harmed. When Akṣar's general answers about policy do not provide access to concrete sources, its silence becomes still more political.

The chapter reveals a central critical proposition of the work: even an institution capable of correct calculation may act unjustly if affected people have no access to its decisions. The claim of ultimate human control over machines must be subjected to practical testing.

To treat Akṣar's silence as proof of deceit by the machine would erase the work's other questions. The silence must also be read as the joint consequence of limits on information access, security policy, and the failure of civic hearings. What the text has yet to prove must not be turned into a final attribution of guilt by criticism either.

Chapter 22: Two Truths of the Same City

The protected neighbourhoods of Janakakṣetra and its resource-deprived settlements disclose two different experiences of the same city. Rājan, Maithilī, and the medical needs of Kumud's family collide within difficult decisions about supply. An outright suspension of energy could also destroy the refrigerated protection of medicines; investigation and service must therefore proceed together.

The chapter's strength lies in fashioning class difference into an actual decision. The hunger of the poor is not merely a moral slogan: it is tied to contracts, the key to the storehouse, and the time required to travel. Here the novel's treatment of socio-economic questions becomes concrete.

Chapter 23: A Soldier's Dissent

Karṇeś confronts military power, political accusations, and personal exhaustion together. His refusal to execute a strike order based on incomplete evidence is not a repudiation of professional honour but a new interpretation of the soldier's duty of defence. For a moment he even wishes to resign, but does not treat withdrawal as an answer to responsibility.

Karṇeś becomes more human here because the adversary is not an external attack but uncertainty about his own decision. "A Soldier's Dissent" portrays the discipline of opposition: questioning an order is not the same as laying down one's arms.

Chapter 24: The First Day of Sanction

During the emergency in Nabhagrāma, Īrā runs the local civic council. She demands that each emergency decision specify its date, limited authority, and an avenue for citizens' objections. The use of every skilled worker against external risk has postponed scheduled tests of the air-purification system inside: this small instance reveals how ordinary life may be neglected in the name of emergency.

The chapter identifies a general problem of government under emergency powers: will authority granted during a crisis relinquish itself when the danger passes? Īrā's proposal to establish beforehand the rules for changing decisions is a noteworthy example of political craft.

Part Five: Fusion

Chapter 25: The Fault of Silent Calculation

Vācaspati and Sunayanā press the question of how omitted dissent was accounted for in the historical data underlying Akṣar's decisions. It is wrong to call

"evidence not found" the "absence of opposition." The machine's silence is not merely a statistical error; it can erase the rights of those never given a chance to speak. A nursing assistant's vehicle delayed at a modest gate turns that small barrier into a judicial test of an immense system.

The poetic meaning of fusion here is not the concentration of power but the coordination of disagreement and reasoning. The work extends criticism from enumerating expected outcomes to counting "those who were not even seen."

The image of a leaking drop of water, set against Sunayanā's initial pride in production, is extremely important. A system capable of calculating the exchanges of millions cannot detect the smallest damage within its own precinct; the contradiction gives the title "Silent Calculation" a concrete artistic meaning.

Chapter 26: Meghrāj's Argument

Meghrāj justifies hiding scientific uncertainty in the name of protecting people from fear. Nīlam keeps the original weather report, the selected pictures circulated publicly, and confidential distribution channels separate. Half the presentation of truth becomes a political construction. Meghrāj's error is not merely the denial of facts, but the assumption that the people cannot endure uncertainty.

The chapter is intellectually uncompromising because it reveals the difference between public education and public management. Yet because Meghrāj's private life and the development of his convictions are less fully portrayed, his arguments sometimes become policy proposals rather than the expression of an individual character.

Chapter 27: The Beginning of Public Testimony

At Janakakṣetra's community hall, scientists, physicians, auditors, archivists, ordinary citizens, and legal representatives attempt to fashion a public system of evidence. The different diagnoses of chemical exposure from the Toxin Repository and Shadow Fever, patients' consent, independent copies of records, and the right to appeal decisions all enter the discussion.

This is a founding chapter for the work. Public testimony is removed from the realm of emotional collective opinion and given a form through procedure, respect for the limits of sources, and written reasons for refusal. Yet the elaborate procedures of the gathering occasionally reverse the balance between dramatic tension and legislative proposal.

The first draft of Public Testimony brings together original public documents, representation, appeal, and confidentiality. The process is effective because Maithilī's childhood drawing of seven circles reappears in this chapter. A simple image of questioning becomes an inspiration for public legislation.

Chapter 28: A Rain of Orbital Debris

Facing the danger of orbital debris at Nabhagrāma-4, Īrā separately verifies supplies for the hospital, agricultural chamber, and transport. She refuses to treat her personal anxiety about not having heard from her father as evidence of risk. A child's drawing—"If the cord breaks, we will hold hands"—humanizes the interdependence of a community in crisis.

An impending catastrophe in the sky is brought down into the kitchen, medicine, and cultivation. Īrā's restraint is not merely a characteristic of her office but a sign of critical control over her personal fear.

Chapter 29: The Price of Survival

Amid the distribution of food, energy, and medical equipment in Śāradā's hospital, Rājan discovers the unwavering priority accorded to a private storage centre. A troubling practice becomes clear, but he refuses to declare an individual finally guilty without independent proof of the order. Separation within a family struggling to obtain medical resources, and an elderly woman's identity card, give the narrative its anguish.

The "price of survival" is not merely the economic cost of resources but the political valuation of life in an unequal society. Both records and food are necessary here, because a grand debate about justice alone cannot keep a patient alive.

Chapter 30: The Shadow of the Repository

In debating control and disarmament of the Disintegration Repository, political commitments, and civilian risk, Rudranāth invokes examples of earlier catastrophes to justify swift action. Karṇeś acknowledges that counting time during a crisis is genuinely necessary, but that the irreversible harm of a strike based on incomplete sources is no less real. A cleaner's worry for her daughter living in Nabhagrāma makes the human cost of the military argument plain.

The chapter does not dismiss Rudranāth's security argument as wholly absurd, but demands legal limits upon its extension. The relation between military records and public accountability prepares the concluding conflict of the first cycle.

Part Six: Agnivaṃśa

Chapter 31: All Seven Gates

The multiple centres of the Sūryakuṇḍ network, the hospital's life-saving needs, shortages of food, and the interdependence of the seven security systems become the ethical consequences of the work's first cycle. Sunayanā keeps separate accounts of each centre's condition and its effects on civilian services. Rājan detects evidence that maintenance funds were diverted to another category, but the diversion itself is not declared the complete cause of the catastrophe.

The chapter's seven gates signify not merely entrances to seven machines but seven forms of public responsibility. Medicine, military decisions, energy, and the voices of Public Testimony converge in one complex.

Chapter 32: The Order That Was Not Obeyed

Karṇeś is pressed to authorize a strike on an unidentified orbital object assumed to be hostile. His central objection is that three incomplete indications cannot be combined into proof of definite hostility. The exhaustion of the working crews is also treated as a factor in the outcome of security operations; there is a demand to account for human labour absent from automated warnings.

This is a decisive stage in the character's development. Refusing to fire is not a decision to do nothing but to assume the burden of alternative verification. Karṇeś defines valour in terms of limits placed upon measurement, timing, and human cost.

Chapter 33: The Fire of Self-Limitation

In Nabhagrāma, Īrā questions Akṣar directly about the limits of its power and authorization. A dispute over the allocation of a protected component—lighting for the school or refrigeration for medical supplies—also becomes a difficult ethical decision for the public assembly. The insistence on independent judicial oversight in an emergency is not hostility to machines but a search for their proper limits.

The title "Self-Limitation" applies to human beings as well: Īrā does not desire an exaggerated heroism for herself. The work tests authority by its ability to tolerate dissent.

Chapter 34: Those Whose Names Did Not Survive

After several days of prolonged crisis, the question arises of maintaining separate registers for the dead, unidentified dead, and missing. Śāradā refuses to display confidence by announcing a large figure; a wrong name may steal hope from a living family. Maithilī brings back into view the testimony of Maṅgalā Devī's daughter and incomplete relief records.

The chapter does not turn sorrow into a statistical object; rather, it places the right to grief beneath the source of every figure. The language of records becomes a public ethics of mourning.

Not having found a dead person's name and being unable to prove a death are two different forms of helplessness. The work joins the social right to mourn to the limits of inquiry; a declaration made with unjustified certainty can intensify the suffering of relatives.

Chapter 35: The Inheritance of Fire

After the initial crisis, political work proceeds on rules for reform, inspection of the Disintegration Repository, citizens' questions, and independent copies of records. A phased and verifiable course is proposed in response both to supporters

of Rudranāth who fear the rapid destruction of weapons and to opponents who demand their immediate elimination. A woman citizen's actual arrears of promised supply reveal the limited success of the rules on paper.

The "inheritance of fire" is no slogan of victory but a functioning system accompanied by letters of dissent. Administration after the event becomes a labour of society still unfinished, rather than the drama's conventional final scene.

Chapter 36: Agnivaṃśa

Eighteen months later, Sūryakuṇḍ is functioning, though not equally in every area. Rājan prepares an independent account of the supply that actually reaches households. The incomplete recovery of pond fish and streams shows that restarting technology does not completely restore nature. Maithilī adds fields, schools, hospitals, workshops, and a cord connecting to Nabhagrāma to her first drawing of seven circles.

This chapter could serve as the conclusion of the first novel-like unit. The work, however, refuses complacency: unanswered questions concerning reform remain open. The Great Severance of the second half will submit these unresolved matters to the test of history.

Eighteen months later, rice seedlings and the ruins of a purification wall occupy opposite sides of one courtyard. Their coexistence shows both the achievements and incompleteness of the first half. "Agnivaṃśa" is therefore a provisional answer, not the entire novel's final proclamation of victory.

Part Seven: Darkness

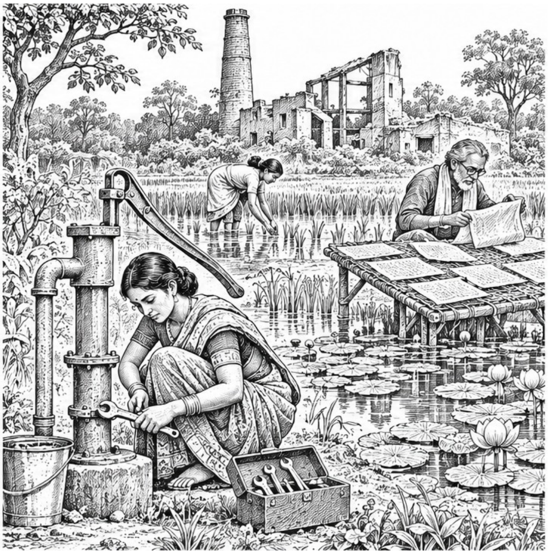
Chapter 37: The Warning Nobody Heard

After a leap of many years, Maithilī is now an experienced worker in Public Testimony. Birds settle on the old chimney, but dangers arising from deferred repairs remain. A difficult gap opens between natural signals, delayed maintenance, public information, and ordinary preparations by the people. With the "Seven Days Before the Fall," the story begins a new reckoning of time.

This chapter is among the work's most effective structural turning points. The reforms of the first half are not declared destroyed; their durability is to be tested by an external disaster. The unheard warning points both to neglect by authority and to the restricted reach of the machine.

The bird perched above the chimney and the traffic passing the Public Testimony building are unobtrusive signs of many years having passed. The Great Severance does not arise abruptly like an unknown monster: neglected maintenance, public warnings, and administrative complacency construct its background.

Chapter 38: The Hand Pump



After the Great Severance: the hand pump, the pond, and the preservation of records

In a riverside village, Urmilā Maṇḍal works the handle of a hand pump in search of water. The need to distinguish usable parts from the old factory from hazardous scrap, the makhānā pond, and seeds for the next month's food are all present together. Water beginning to flow does not justify declaring "the village is saved"; tests of purity, distance of distribution, and the time spent in queues remain to be addressed.

This chapter makes the vast abstraction of the Great Severance extraordinarily tangible. The groan of the pump's metal, the line of water-pots, and a woman's daily labour constitute a new heroism. The narrative now measures the reality of "development" by the difficulty of obtaining water.

Urmilā waiting with her hand upon the pump lever is a concrete experience of catastrophe. This labour is neither a victory for an "old age" nor the utter defeat of great machines. Attending to the seeds needed next month alongside the immediate need for each vessel of water expands the chapter's temporal vision.

Chapter 39: Rationing the Ward

When power is limited at the hospital, decisions about which services will continue and which must be suspended bear directly upon patients' bodies. Śāradā establishes priorities among respiratory support, infant care, and the refrigeration of medicines. Writing rules does not extinguish the anger of suffering families; the reasons for her decisions and the available alternatives are therefore made explicit.

The disaster narrative acquires an exceptionally severe scene: darkness is not merely surroundings, but the time remaining for treatment and the temperature of a drug. Śāradā's ethics is tested in difficult practical choices, not in speeches.

Chapter 40: A Sky Without Orders

Karṇeś acts as a civilian amid the needs for shelter, food, medicine, and protection from possible orbital danger in the surviving city. It is easy to say "evacuate the people," but where will they find water, safe ground, and care for the elderly afterward? Such questions expose the incompleteness of military security orders. Alongside a board recording food available, another board records "how many people received none."

The chapter honours the citizen who draws a map of needs rather than the heroic protector. "Without orders" does not mean anarchy, but recognising one's responsibilities where lawful orders are absent.

Chapter 41: The Radio of Rumours

After the Great Severance, Nīlam's newspaper page is assembled from wet paper, oral testimony, and unstable radio signals. Claims such as "Akṣar brought all the darkness" circulate without sources. Conveying distant news and correcting it afterward require different kinds of labour. A proposal to write news upon the stone of a village shows that durable preservation and public dissemination are not identical media.

This chapter powerfully compares communication technologies before and after the catastrophe. Truth in the novel is not the possession of digital marks alone; paper copies, collective readings, and readiness to correct errors are also instruments of democracy.

Chapter 42: The Silence of Nabhagrāma-4

Contact between the orbital settlement and news from Earth has become fragmented. Īrā must confront the meaning of the silence available to her: the absence of a reply does not prove death, destruction, or deliberate secrecy. The preservation of life-supporting air, water, and limited resources continues amid this silence. The window looking towards Earth now reveals the failure of communication and access.

In narrative terms, "silence" is not merely an empty space in the flow of information but the memory of distant family and a blocked route for assistance. The reader experiences the grief of incomplete knowledge.

Part Eight: Ashes

Chapter 43: The Pump of the Mind

Even after the pump has been mechanically repaired, Urmilā remains concerned about whether the queue for distributing water has become inclusive. An elderly woman, families living far away, women exhausted by work, and a guard's demand for security present distinct problems. A functioning pump is not

enough; there must be a daily register of the distance and time required to collect water.

The title “The Pump of the Mind” moves from the iron of the machine towards human ethical endeavour. The chapter is effective because it joins physical success to the question of social distribution, though it too contains recurring maxims about public policy.

Chapter 44: The First Page of Evidence

At a surviving printing press, Nīlam prepares a news page that identifies its sources, the current status of evidence, and the date of correction. An old book of refugees’ names may serve as evidence of rights. Amid damaged printing skills, wet sheets, and public mistrust, one page becomes the foundation for public contestation.

The chapter transforms the politics of media into living matter. The difficulties of paper, ink, copying, water, and public reading are structural scenes within the narrative, not ornament.

The labour of printing one page in a broken press recalls the concrete material foundation of modern mass communication. The capacity of an information-based society is tested not only by its ability to write accurate news but by its ability to reproduce, distribute, and reread the record.

Chapter 45: The Value of the Archive

In the Great Severance, the water-soaked *pañjī* archive has lost letters, family lineages, and memories of land. Maithilī and Jīveś seek a separate register for correcting incomplete names, but older records cannot automatically supply justifications for present injustice. The ethical distinction between safe use of Śāradā’s confidential medical information and the demand for public verification comes to the fore.

The physical image of soaked pages is an excellent literary moment. When names disappear, not only memory but rights to relief, land, and life may disappear with them. Respect for the history of a source and criticism of that source are both necessary.

The line of mud records the level reached by water in the building; it cannot measure the depth of names lost from the pages. Through the distinction between these two measures the “value of the archive” acquires another meaning. The novel calls for the preservation of old registers but does not make their lineage-based authority immutable law.

Chapter 46: The Other Side of the Void

On the hundred and second day after the Fall, Earth appears grey from Nabhagrāma-4’s observation deck. Īrā must make decisions among the limited capacity for orbital evacuation, places for carers accompanying patients, opportunities for citizens who wish to leave, and risks borne by those remaining.

Figures from old machines, present medical observations, and the reach of unknown observations are kept distinct.

The chapter asks not simply who should be saved first, but who will be able to appeal against that decision. Īrā places herself last in the order, while resisting any conversion of that choice into a display of heroism; this is a sign of the novel's self-criticism.

Chapter 47: The Name of the Disease

In the Forest Refuge Zone, the popular label "Akṣar Poison" spreads as a misleading conflation of two separate medical conditions. Śāradā distinguishes symptoms, water sources, environmental exposure, and infection. Children are taught that the provisional name of an uncertain disease may change when new evidence arrives.

The chapter turns the correction of one crossed-out letter in a physician's register into an ethical act. The dignity of scientific truth lies not in preserving an old name unchanged, but in revising it when sufficiently strong new evidence appears.

Chapter 48: The Price of an Order

Karṇeś examines a document claiming exclusive control over energy facilities, pumps, and workshops for a new local security council. The home, wages, daughter, and food worries of the injured artisan Harinārāyaṇ expose the inhuman generalizations of the administrative order. Karṇeś rejects the lure of military honours and proposes public guards and a path for citizens to ask questions.

The novel shows that domination can return even after the great machines of the future have ceased to function—now through iron gates and food vouchers. The struggle for accountability is therefore directed not only against Akṣar but also against the human appetite for domination.

Part Nine: Seed Repository

Chapter 49: The Account of Seeds

In the flooded seed store of the Forest Refuge Zone, old machine inventories no longer match the condition of the actual grain. Śāradā separately examines the origins, germination, current safety, and unjust distribution of makhānā, rice, and pulse seeds. A discrepancy between the seven handfuls given by one family and the five received provokes an accusation of theft, but guilt is not settled without inquiry.

The chapter refuses to make the rebirth of life into a miracle tale. Hope for the seed is tied to soil, time, labour, and the discipline of evidence. Two grains preserved from a mother of an earlier generation are precious signs of memory, but not automatic proof of scientific suitability.

The accounting of seed requires knowledge of the mother plant, soil, water, and the actual conditions of storage. Safeguarding seeds becomes not merely museum-like remembrance but a social inheritance of agricultural knowledge. Such fine-grained locality binds the immense future narrative to specific life processes in Mithilā.

Chapter 50: Four Paths

"Four Paths," marked in chalk on the wall of a ruined school, signifies four ideological options for reconstruction. The debate turns on blind faith in machines, Akṣar's commands, Sahadev's manual knowledge, and shared public decision-making. Maithilī places four questions in the new rule: the machine's suggestion, direct verification, testimony of affected citizens, and ultimate responsibility.

The "Four Paths of Evidence" from Chapter 10 return here as choices about how to live. This structural echo gives the work greater density. Four empty spaces on a sheet of paper reveal that Public Testimony does not consist merely in drafting laws, but also in creating a safe opportunity to speak.

Chapter 51: Sahadev's School

Sahadev's school teaches the use of wood, bamboo, rope, hand tools, the rusted remains of factories, and comparisons with old instruments of measurement. Urmilā acknowledges the importance of manual skills, while refusing an indiscriminate rejection of useful, life-saving equipment. A child's injury, safe repairs, the correction of an inaccurate figure in an account, and flexible attendance for working pupils are the chapter's concrete achievements.

The school's premise is original: education comprises both knowledge from books and skills learned through the hands. Treating the bodily knowledge of artisans not as science's adversary but as its indispensable observer becomes a lesson for a new civilization.

Sahadev's school teaches more than the history of hand tools; it teaches the distinction between dependence and self-reliance. Readers should observe that learning to repair an implement and prohibiting it altogether are not the same decision. This distinction will be severely tested in Chapter 59.

Chapter 52: Bhāskar's Promise

In the second year, Bhāskar Rāy appears with a promise to restart a surviving energy centre and provide work. The administration describes the homes of displaced families who have lived on the site for two years as "empty rooms." The council questions the safety of workers, their right to stop working, wages registered under women's own names, and ownership of shared tools.

Bhāskar's promise is attractive because hunger, unemployment, and the shortage of energy are real. The narrative does not ridicule this hope; it examines its conditions and the inequality of rights attached to it. This complexity makes Bhāskar more interesting than a mere deceiver.

Chapter 53: The Remainder in Orbit

The old collision damage at Nabhagrāma-4 and its limited orbital resources keep Īrā cautiously distant from reconstruction on Earth in the second year. The settlement's knowledge of space is invaluable, but spacecraft, air, water, medicine, and cultivation impose concrete limits on cost. News of food on Earth and the question of Nabhagrāma's own survival alter the value of each other's resources.

The chapter shows that rescue decisions made from afar cannot erase the rights of the citizens nearest the danger. The question of "beneficiaries of protection" in the first part now becomes one of "partners in a shared crisis."

Chapter 54: The Archive of Darkness

Nīlam compares maintenance before the Great Severance, scientific warnings, the limits of public policy, and the fragmented recollections of surviving Witness Sections. Some propaganda claims that changing a single warning threshold caused the failure of all machines; Nīlam checks this alluring story of a solitary cause. A factory woman's testimony shows how budget shortages affected food and days of employment.

The chapter is an important component of the work's writing of its own history. A signature upon a sheet of paper is not complete proof of culpability: authority, knowledge, causation, and consequence demand separate examination. The history of disaster is not just a list of dates, but a labour-intensive record of people's lives.

Part Ten: The Test

Chapter 55: The Justice of the Akṣar Pavilion

At the gate of Bhāskar's pavilion, the proclamation "everyone has a share" and the small-print condition "the centre's order is final" cancel each other out. Nīlam hears distinct claims from workers, holders of food vouchers, villages whose land has changed hands, and independent communal stores. The pavilion makes real efforts to provide grain, medicine, and employment, but its system of appeal and the original source of its machine remain unknown.

The counterfeit form of justice looks convincing precisely because some people obtain genuine assistance through it. The chapter exposes the difference between "doing good" and possessing "legitimate authority." Nīlam's seven questions amount directly to a code of democratic contestation.

At the gate, "Everyone has a share in the justice of Complete Akṣar" and, beneath it, "The centre's order is final" make contradictory political covenants. An orphaned child's empty vessel gives visible form to the moral bankruptcy of the formal claim, even though the novel acknowledges that the centre does provide some actual relief.

Chapter 56: The Two Faces of an Order

Karṇeś simultaneously visits the Akṣar Pavilion, listens to artisans' need for employment, and demands written evidence supporting punishments. The testimony of guards and workers makes clear that not all employees willingly support the regime's harshness. While acknowledging some useful work done by Bhāskar's centre, Karṇeś opposes threats to withhold food and the blocking of avenues of appeal.

The title's "two faces" are the double meaning of a single order: support offered in the name of protection and punishment imposed in the name of discipline. Karṇeś's civilian experience casts a new critical light upon his military past.

Chapter 57: The First Lesson in Questioning

Amid the dust of the old school, Maithilī brings together her mother Sunayanā's lessons in science, Urmilā's water testing, and the answers of a surviving Memory Witness. The partial knowledge of one Witness Section cannot become the voice of Complete Akṣar; she teaches this distinction to the children through an example involving grains. To call Bhāskar's claim about "Complete Akṣar" unverified is not to reject all knowledge produced by machines.

The chapter's strength lies in the dialogue between childlike questions and complex knowledge. Accepting that an old book may be wrong without treating it as the final authority becomes a new discipline of education.

Chapter 58: The Patient's Rights

At Bhāskar's pavilion, the right to receive medicine and food vouchers is attached to pressure for "universal consent." Patients sign, but do not understand what permission they have given or for which purposes. Śāradā defends reading documents aloud, independent treatment options, confidentiality of personal medical information, and the right not to be enrolled in an experiment without informed agreement.

The chapter tests the philosophy of consent against the harsh realities of hunger and illness. Rejection of the false bargain—"whoever gives food acquires complete authority over the body"—is one of the narrative's ethical achievements.

Chapter 59: The Village Without Machines

A settlement rejects the authority of machines, a policy born of a genuine desire for freedom. But the prohibition of essential means of medical communication results in the death of Dīpā, Kamalā's infant. Urmilā separately examines the layers of causation: the state of the illness, help that was available, the decision made at the gate, and the rule of prohibition. A little neem sapling deepens the scene of grief.

This is among the work's most moving and decisive chapters. Opposition to the wrongful governance of technology can itself, if extended into a total ban on

necessary instruments, cause the loss of life. The narrative here makes plain the ethical cost of extreme self-sufficiency.

In the episode of the infant's treatment, pride in one's labour must be distinguished from the consequences of prohibiting therapeutic means. The novel does not erase Sahadev's contribution to education, but neither does it postpone questions about the destructive consequences of his ideas.

Chapter 60: The Eye of Orbit

Īrā compares Bhāskar's claim of "complete security" in orbit with actual debris inspections at Nabhagrāma. The memory preserved by the old Vajra Witness is incomplete; certain time seals have been lost. Arrangements are made to keep one copy digitally, another in a separate secure chamber, and a third as a handwritten abstract. Instead of military threats, the settlement chooses independent education, relief, and the sharing of records.

The limited evidence possessed by the orbital settlement itself confirms the wider principle of the novel: independent observation is not the same as possession of complete truth. Īrā sees the power of democracy in the right to revise one's own conclusions.

Part Eleven: The Flame of Accord

Chapter 61: The Sixty-Day Limit

The "sixty days" associated with a future orbital danger are becoming, through rumour, a precise countdown to apocalypse, whereas the actual scientific information consists of limited and uncertain observations. Īrā makes a public decision balancing the cost of aid available for Earth against the resources required for Nabhagrāma's own survival. The separate functions of the seven Witness Sections and the incompleteness of their information are systematically disclosed here.

Combining all knowledge is not automatically the right solution; shared errors can also spread rapidly. The sixty-day interval becomes not prophecy but a discipline of caution and repeated testing in decision-making.

Chapter 62: The Gate of the Kuṇḍ

Urmilā reaches the old Sūryakuṇḍ centre with registers of workers' safety, records of injuries, samples of pond water, and plans for repair. A former inspector cannot provide all evidence concerning current risks, but not every building is equally unsafe either. Threats to suspend food vouchers for the family of an injured labourer expose the danger of servitude in the name of reconstruction.

A noteworthy ethical principle of the narrative is that the worth of an industrial restart is measured not by the brightness of the building but by the justice reaching workers' homes. Placing a question from a woman relative at the beginning of a report is not merely symbolic: it redistributes power in practice.

Chapter 63: The Limit of Restraint

At the Sūryakuṇḍ gate, Bhāskar's guards, displaced families, and a crowd of workers assemble. Karṇeś mediates without weapons; his hand is injured because of disorder and an unsafe gate. He does not fasten immediate responsibility for the injury upon one individual. A temporary cessation of hostilities is put in writing; it is not announced as a settlement.

The artistic success of the chapter lies in inscribing the price of restraint upon the body. Rather than the grand word "peace," the truthful phrase "temporary cessation of hostilities" is harder, but more authentic.

Displaced families, workers, guards, and food vouchers come into conflict together in the crowd at the main gate. Karṇeś's injury breaks the conventions of heroic narrative: the body's vulnerability during a crisis of decision brings protagonist and ordinary citizen within the same frame.

Chapter 64: Evidence of the Mask

Nīlam investigates how Bhāskar's supporters have turned uncertain observations spanning sixty days into a prediction of certain catastrophe. A valid signature seal does not guarantee that the claim is true. Separate evidence concerning Karṇeś's wound, food shortages, and the denial of inspection is forwarded to Vaidehī's hearing.

The "mask" is not merely a person's disguise but the construction of legitimacy itself. The novel shows that even when the provenance of a source is established, its purpose, the context removed from it, and the testimony of affected people still require investigation.

Chapter 65: Akṣar's Answer

Maithilī presents the actual responses of the limited Memory Witness at the assembly of Public Testimony. Bhāskar's imitation of "Complete Akṣar" is not equivalent to the capacity of the section actually available. Distinct levels of ethical responsibility—human claims to power, faults of machines, natural space weather, and neglected maintenance—remain separate. An elderly teacher recalls both the advantages of scientific assistance and the danger of placing it under a single absolute proprietor.

This chapter is a mature return to the principal dialogue of the first half. Acknowledging defects in machines does not mean repudiating all knowledge produced by them; nor may faulty human government be absolved by invoking a machine's name.

The narrative tests the restraint required not to make the Memory Witness's answer into a new universal command. The child's question and the schoolroom phrase "understand by testing" become an emblem of verifiable social memory in place of machine-delivered truth.

Chapter 66: The Conditions of Consent

At the assembly of Public Testimony, Śāradā asks about the terms governing patients' private information and its possible use by reconnected machine services. It is wrong to suspend agricultural assistance because a patient refuses treatment; the need for seeds should be determined by soil, food, and labour. If a patient cannot read, the meaning of the decision must be read aloud and arrangements made for separate testimony. Silence is not consent.

The chapter connects the regulations of Public Testimony not simply with control over technology but with bodily autonomy and rights to food. Before the vote, the mandatory conditions of consent are made clear.

The novel offers no easy compromise between the need for medicines and the wish to protect privacy. Before using the testimony of someone who needs treatment, its meaning must be explained, permission obtained, and the option of refusal kept real.

Part Twelve: New Agnivaṃśa

Chapter 67: The Day of the Vote

People cross the broken bridge over the Kosi to vote on the limited reconnection of machines. For Karṇeś, ensuring a safe landing for the boat before checking citizens' identities is a matter of practical justice. Even a young man carrying a leaflet of false propaganda is not removed from the voting queue. Consent to reconnection does not transfer the entirety of government to machines; it authorizes only a conditional public trial of two Witness Services.

The chapter makes democracy more than a count of votes: it becomes a matter of material access. Boats, rivers, injuries, motherhood, and travel time all determine whether the vote can be exercised. Here the narrative is subtly powerful.

Chapter 68: The Register of the Dead

Śāradā prepares three distinct books for the dead, the missing, and those whose condition is uncertain. A machine list records Dīpā as "treatment unavailable," but human testimony shows that medical help existed and was blocked by the rule forbidding machines. An elderly woman previously presumed dead is later found alive; the correction also alters a dispute over land rights.

The chapter's compassion resides in its responsibility towards the correct letters on paper. The recovery of a proper name can transform the life and legal standing of a family. Reviewing a death register is not disrespect towards mourning, but respect for it.

Separate records in three books resist the easy pressure to abolish uncertainty. Keeping death, disappearance, and incomplete information distinct supplies a foundation for renewed hearings for relatives and for judicial amendment.

Chapter 69: Opening the Accounts

Nīlam separates sources concerning natural signals, neglected maintenance, warning policy, faults of Witness Sections, and Bhāskar's government upon five coloured pieces of cloth. A natural event does not absolve later human injustice, and the crimes of a government do not erase the natural causes of the original Great Severance. The omission of women's names from the record of canal excavation reveals an invisible fault of reconstruction.

The chapter offers the clearest method of causal attribution in the entire novel. Refusing the desire for a single dazzling villain is a form of judicial maturity; however, the neatly arranged fivefold classification risks making the discussion didactic at times.

The five colours of cloth constitute one of the novel's most concentrated emblems. Once categories are distinguished from natural signals to subsequent political exploitation, culpability can neither be effortlessly erased nor simply placed upon one name. The work's understanding of multiple causation becomes most clearly visible here.

Chapter 70: The Code of the Sky

At a joint hearing involving Nabhagrāma-4 and Earth, Īrā seeks a balance among orbital information, energy needed for local life, and citizens' rights to object. The actual cost of deciding between the energy needed for one small green leaf and the need to send a warning to Earth is made visible. Uncertain risk neither guarantees false reassurance nor justifies exaggerated declarations of terror.

The code of the sky does not establish unlimited authority over weapons. It becomes an agreement on the bounded sharing of separate sources, civic review, and protection of essential local energy supplies. Īrā transforms her sense of orbital identity into an equal right of dialogue with all of Earth.

The difference between "may" in one account and "will" in another reveals the danger of turning possibility into an order. A common code for the sky between Earth and Nabhagrāma demands not just the measurement of risk but a civic discipline of examining language.

Chapter 71: Questions from a New Generation

In a surviving Sūryakuṇḍ workshop, a public trial of the limited reconnection of the Kuṇḍ Witness and Memory Witness takes place. When an independent instrument displays a small discrepancy, Urmilā asks what tolerance limit has been validated; the entire trial must stop pending investigation. Students' questions, the memory of old dark screens, and handmade tools determine the social conditions under which future machines may be used.

The chapter makes the "new generation" not the recipient of answers but their examiner. Calculation and judicial priority are not identical; instead of turning

medicine and agriculture into enemies, there must be a process for providing public reasons.

The public testing of the Witness Sections' limited reconnection differs from the old celebration of great machinery with which the novel began. This time, making both a failed recommendation and a successful stoppage public is considered desirable. The scene of testing transforms reassurance into accountability.

Chapter 72: The Inheritance of Agnivaṃśa

A new generation tests inherited knowledge: manual craft, public learning, and orbital witness

In the tenth year after the Great Severance, the boat on the Kosi, a bundle of seeds, the makhānā pond, the ruined chimney, and the new school form one extended scene. Only two Witness Sections operate together under specified conditions; the other five remain independently bounded. A new seedling on old contaminated earth does not prove "total restoration": the narrative keeps open the distance between returning life and reconsidering justice.

The final scene answers the brilliant Sūryakuṇḍ of Chapter 1. The future's inheritance is not secret ownership of mechanical power but the right to amend, respect for labour, the memory of the dead, and a tradition of open questions. The optimism of the work remains incomplete but responsible.

The final child's question is not made an occasion for the machine's self-congratulation. The answer "You can shut me down" would be inadequate if it remained only an ethical maxim; the chapter also includes direct testing of its operation, the separation of the five remaining service sections, and an image of incomplete reconstruction. This open ending is the work's critical richness.

Appendix Two: Selected Quotations from the Original Text and Critical Contexts

The brief quotations in this appendix have been checked against the attached original text of *Agnivaṃśa*. Chapter numbers follow its original table of contents. These words represent the voices of particular characters, the narrator, or social situations within the fiction; not every sentence is treated as a personal judgment of the author.

Chapter 1: "People have the right to know the name of their suffering." — Set against the prosperous technology of the inauguration, this statement, in the context of Janakakṣetra's thirst, discloses the distance between statistical vocabulary and actual pain. People demand not only services but an accurate account of their crisis.

Chapter 2: "Truth is not the monopoly of any one office." — From Īrā's position in Nabhagrāma-4, independent examination is not an "alternative opinion," but a necessary condition of credible knowledge about shared risk.

Chapter 8: "A storm of deception does not merely manufacture lies; it also abandons half a piece of truth, like an orphan." — The politics of half-truth and edited broadcasting teaches the difference between an authentic original source and a defective social meaning.

Chapter 10: "Evidence is not merely an answer; it is also a path by which to question an answer." — In the context of teaching associated with Vācaspati, the ethical value of evidence resides in its openness to renewed examination.

Chapter 16: "The burden increases, not the right." — An important internal criterion against treating an obligation to assume responsibility during a crisis as an automatic justification for expanding power.

Chapter 25: "Evidence not found is not evidence of support." — People omitted from calculations or records that are unavailable cannot be made into proof for a convenient conclusion.

Chapter 38: "Survival begins with today's water-pot, but the seed for next month's food must survive now." — The tension between immediate relief and long-term reconstruction in a post-crisis society is concentrated in these words.

Chapter 45: "Not every line of an old register can automatically determine rights in the future." — A necessary distinction between preserving an archive and granting the archive unchecked political authority.

Chapter 55: "Everyone has a share in the justice of Complete Akṣar." — This is a propagandistic proclamation by those in power; the work does not endorse it as an ideal principle, but questions the legitimacy of its centralised claim to justice.

Chapter 65: "The person who wrote the machine's name upon his claim to power remains responsible for that claim." — Human decision-makers cannot disappear behind the cover of technological authority.

Chapter 68: “A register that closes the way to its own correction has only the names written on its paper as grounds for trust.” — In the context of the dead, the missing, and the right to amend records, this becomes an essential condition of a just archive.

Chapter 72: “The price of a cheap, unsafe object is ultimately paid by the bodies of the poor.” — The epilogue measures the return of technology against safety and social class rather than celebrating cheapness.

Appendix Three: Bibliography and Research Sources

The external studies listed in this bibliography do not establish the sources of *Agnivaṃśa*, direct influences upon it, or any acknowledged theoretical declaration by its author. Their purpose in this criticism is to open conceptual questions. The only authoritative basis for the original novel's sequence of events, quotations, and character relations is its attached text. The contexts of quotations are identified by chapter number.

Original Text (Primary Source)

Gajendra Thakur. *Agnivaṃśa: Sapta-Kavaca · Pralaya-Uttara Uttarakāṇḍa*. Maithili novel, first edition, 2023. The seventy-two-chapter 6 × 9-inch Word text available for this study. Characters, events, chronology, and quotations were verified against that text.

Comparative and Theoretical Works (Secondary Sources)

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[11] Devakanta Jha. *A History of Modern Maithili Literature: Post-independence Period*. Sahitya Akademi, 2004. Comparative background on the history of modern Maithili literature. https://books.google.co.in/books/about/A_History_of_Modern_Maithili_Literature.html?hl=en&id=hdRjAAAAMAAJ&output=html_text

The City's Other Face: A Narratological Study

Research Abstract

The subject of the present research study is Gajendra Thakur's Maithili novel The City's Other Face. Beginning with the search for employment undertaken by Naina Mishra, an educated but unemployed young woman, the novel moves through financial fraud perpetrated in the name of employment, workers' insecurity, Poonam Yadav's disappearance, the death of Naresh Mandal, networks of local prestige and finance, the ethical limits of journalism, the procedural imperatives of investigation, and the rehabilitation of survivors. The study's central proposition is that the city's 'other face' does not designate merely some concealed criminal underworld. It names, rather, those relations of modern civic life in which hope, labour, documents, creditworthiness, insecurity and rights remain inextricably entangled.

The primary basis of analysis is all sixty chapters of the available digital copy of the original work. Its method combines close reading; examination of the causes and consequences of characters' decisions; narrative perspective, temporal arrangement, dialogue and object-symbols; the inverse correspondence between beginning and ending; and scrutiny of the narrative's evidentiary order. Its theoretical points of reference include narratology (Genette), dialogism and the chronotope (Bakhtin), capabilities and social freedom (Sen and Nussbaum), indicators of forced labour, and sources concerning journalism's public responsibilities. These references provide critical contexts; they do not constitute independent verification of the novel's fictional events or of the legal culpability of its characters.

The study demonstrates that the 'queue', 'application', 'copy', 'receipt', 'changed name' and 'evidence' constitute not only the material world of the work but also its narrative grammar. When Naina initially questions a suspect organisation, her effective authority is restricted; by the end she explains to another applicant, at a public assistance centre, her right to ask questions. This transformation is not a comprehensive remedy for structural unemployment but the hard-won achievement of civic discernment. Among the novel's notable accomplishments are its separation of victims' voices from sensationalism, its differentiation between arrest and final justice, and its placement of women's right to economic decision-making at the centre of the narrative. Its limitations include the excessively explanatory register of some dialogue, the remarkably orderly progress of evidence gathering, and a comparatively restricted portrayal of wider caste and class structures.

Keywords: Maithili novel; urban realism; unemployment; labour; women's selfhood; narrative structure; polyphony; archive; evidence; journalistic ethics; civic responsibility.

Outline of the Study

Chapter 1—The research problem, earlier contexts, method and evidentiary limitations. Chapter 2—The title, plot and five-part structure. Chapter 3—The decisions and contradictions of Naina and other characters. Chapter 4—Employment, gender, caste, class, institutions and exploitation. Chapter 5—Narration, dialogue, time, place and symbolism. Chapter 6—Knowledge, evidence, justice, victims' dignity and reconstruction. Chapter 7—Artistic achievements, limitations, research conclusions and further questions. The appendices provide separate examinations of all sixty chapters and an evidentiary guide; primary and secondary references follow.

Reference conventions: [P: chapter number] identifies a passage in the primary novel. [C1] and the succeeding designations refer to external works listed in the bibliography. The printed page on which each chapter of the original begins is reproduced in the appendix from the original copy's contents; no exact page number for a particular line has been supplied by conjecture. Critical précis enclosed in quotation marks should not be mistaken for verbatim utterances of fictional characters unless a direct verbal correspondence with the text is established.

Chapter 1: Research Problem, Earlier Scholarship and Method

1.1 The Need for the Study and Its Central Questions

General discussion of the Maithili novel often remains limited to plot summaries, judgments of characters' moral conduct, or inventories of social problems. Literary inquiry must also ask how a problem acquires narrative form. In The City's Other Face, when an unemployed young woman confronts an offer of five thousand rupees in wages, ten hours of work and an ambiguous appointment letter, the question of labour ceases to be an abstract proposition: it becomes an embodied experience involving sweat, bus fares, the loss of income from tuition work, and the cost of her mother's medicine. This experience subsequently becomes linked to employment fraud, disappearances, murder and the justice system. The structure of this transformation is what criticism must investigate. [P: 1–4, 12–24]

There are five principal research questions. First, what is the social significance of the 'other face', and how does the title render the inequalities within the city perceptible? Second, how do recurrent figures such as 'the queue' and 'the document' regulate narrative causality, time and the circulation of knowledge? Third, what distinctions between social constraint and personal responsibility emerge from the decisions of Naina, Poonam, Vibha, Kiran, Rekha, Madhavi, Sujata, Abhay and Chandan? Fourth, by what formal devices does the text maintain distinctions among information, allegation, suspicion, evidence, arrest and judicial determination? Fifth, is the change at the conclusion personal, institutional, or merely an ethical transformation of hope? Answers are sought

in the conduct of characters and the explicit conditions established by the text, not in a social message the critic would wish it to convey.

The criterion of textual analysis is not whether every statement in the novel corresponds precisely to actual law or prevailing statistical data. Literary truth concerns the credibility of the work's internal causal sequence and the ethical significance of the characters' experiences. Nevertheless, when the narrative insists upon journalistic verification or investigative procedure, criticism itself is bound by an evidentiary discipline. For this reason, unverified literary history, imaginary reviews attributed to critics, false quotations and invented statistics have been rigorously excluded.

1.2 Research Objectives, Working Hypotheses and Contribution

The first objective is to read the novel's five parts as interconnected narrative cycles rather than a mere succession of discrete crimes. The second is to move beyond reductive labels such as 'victim' and 'heroine' when interpreting Naina's and Poonam's decisions. The third is to draw a meaningful chronotopic map of the home, bus station, employment office, warehouse, canal, newsroom and courtroom. The fourth is to trace the mutual dependence of evidentiary ethics and civic life in the novel. The fifth is to evaluate both achievements and limitations without treating the mere importance of the subject matter as automatic proof of artistic distinction.

The working hypotheses are as follows: (a) the novel's central conflict is not simply individual versus criminal, but insecure opportunity versus warranted trust; (b) a 'document' functions in turn as an instrument of rights, a cover for deceit and a surviving trace of the labour of the dead; (c) the women characters do not repeat a single emancipation plot but acquire different forms of agency within different inequalities; and (d) the return of the queue in the last chapter signals neither straightforward defeat nor resolution, but the conjunction of an unresolved system and acquired discernment. These hypotheses are initial proposals for analysis and will be qualified wherever contrary textual evidence warrants it.

The study does not claim an unverified distinction as the 'first' or 'only' treatment of the novel. Its contribution lies instead in a systematic chapter index, an ordered examination of character-based evidence, the relationships among narrative objects, a comparative examination of beginning and ending, and a separation of conceptual sources. These procedures make its claims open to renewed scrutiny.

1.3 The Scope of Literary History and Earlier Works

Jayakant Mishra's History of Maithili Literature (Sahitya Akademi, 1976) and Devakanta Jha's A History of Modern Maithili Literature: Post-independence Period (Sahitya Akademi, 2004) are relevant works in the history of Maithili literature. The Akademi's publication records confirm their bibliographic details [C1–C2]. The description of Devakanta Jha's book identifies a separate chapter

entitled 'Modern Novel'. An important limit of verification must be stated here: the present study has not undertaken a comprehensive comparative reading of the full texts of both works. It therefore cannot present unattributed accounts of their specific conclusions or attribute to either author opinions on this particular novel by Gajendra Thakur.

These two histories indicate a literary background for the present work, but this investigation has not established evidence of previously published research reviews devoted to the 2017 novel. Such an absence does not mean that 'no review has ever appeared'; it means only that the sources cited here do not substantiate that proposition. This study makes no claim to write a universal history of the modern Maithili novel. A close reading of a single work is not a definitive verdict in literary history but a basis for further comparative investigation.

From a comparative standpoint, the novel extends the literary tradition of rural–urban relations into the contemporary economy of employment. Naina travels among buses, cyber shops and offices, while Poonam's family waits for news in the village. City and village are not separate moral continents: their economies, reputations and fears are mutually dependent. Such an approach suggests a possible place for questions of urban labour in modern Maithili fiction; without textually grounded comparison with other works, however, it would be unjustified to pronounce this one 'unique'.

1.4 Theoretical Perspectives: Narrative, Capabilities, Dialogue and Evidence

Gérard Genette's Narrative Discourse (1980) provides a means of distinguishing the order of events, narrative duration, frequency, focalisation and narrative voice [C3]. The protraction of waiting between Poonam's final message and the ensuing search; the unequal temporal movement between Naresh's death and the prolonged investigation; and the recurrence of the initial queue as another queue at the end can be examined through these concepts. Yet invoking Genette cannot be allowed to efface the work's material experience: bus fares, water leaking through a roof and unpaid wages also constitute the finer social temporality of narration.

Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of dialogism and the 'chronotope' help explain the confrontation of different institutional languages within the city [C4]. An advertisement promises a 'secure future', a receipt records a financial transaction, the police station demands a documented complaint, the news editor requires corroboration, and a victim chooses the time in which to recount her memories. These cannot all be called the same 'truth'. Nor does a plurality of characters by itself amount to polyphony: the experiences articulated in different voices must retain some independence within the text. By this standard, the novel's dialogue admits of both praise and criticism.

Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom (1999) and Martha Nussbaum's Women and Human Development (2000) furnish perspectives on the substantive exercise of opportunity, the uses of education, health, choice and women's autonomy

[C5–C6]. In this light, the five-thousand-rupee offer to Naina is not merely a wage figure; it raises the question of whether she possesses any real capacity to refuse the offer. For Poonam, rehabilitation involves the right to determine when to contact her family from a place of safety, when to pause during a statement, and whether to work thereafter. Capability theory thus provides a context for interpreting the novel, not a claim that its author directly applied these books in writing it.

The ILO's Indicators of Forced Labour (2012) and United Nations definitions concerning trafficking in persons point to the need to examine deception, restriction, threats, withheld wages and compromised consent separately [C8, C10]. The novel offers narrative indications of such situations, but the critic does not pronounce a legal 'verdict' establishing the guilt of a particular fictional accused. Similarly, the Press Council's norms of 2022 constitute a useful later reference for journalistic confidentiality and fact-checking [C9]; they do not prove an influence upon the author when writing in 2017.

This is not merely an accumulation of compatible theories. Four fundamental distinctions are preserved: what a character knows within the story; what the reader knows; what the critic infers; and what external research permits one to generalise about society. Avoiding the conflation of these four levels is the methodological discipline of the study.

1.5 Research Materials and Their Limits

The opening pages, publication details and contents of the available digital copy establish the novel's title, author, first-edition year and five-part structure. According to those contents, Part I is 'The Search for Employment' (Chapters 1–12); Part II, 'The Missing People' (13–24); Part III, 'Hatred and Betrayal' (25–36); Part IV, 'The Price of Truth' (37–48); and Part V, 'The Survivors' (49–60). This study treats the text of that copy as primary evidence and makes no claim to have collated it against any unseen earlier edition.

At the first methodological level, the sequence of events and characters' decisions within each part has been examined; at the second, differences between events and their narration, the distribution of information, temporal movement and polyphonic dialogue have been analysed; at the third, questions of labour, caste, class, gendered rights, institutional accountability and victims' rehabilitation have been considered. Some conclusions reproduce explicit statements of the text; others are critical inferences grounded in it. The two are not treated as identical.

Genette's narrative concepts are useful theoretical references, especially for the order of events, narrative duration and focalisation [C3]. Bakhtin's notions of polyphony and chronotope clarify the interrelations among city, office, warehouse and court [C4]. Sen's and Nussbaum's capability-oriented views of justice allow employment to be understood not merely as wages but as

substantive access to safe decisions [C5–C6]. These writings are conceptual contexts, not previously published reviews of this particular novel.

The original edition dates from 2017, whereas the India Employment Report 2024, published by the International Labour Organization and the Institute for Human Development, appeared later [C7]. Its indications are therefore treated not as direct statistical evidence for the events of 2017 but solely as a subsequent social context for the questions the book raises. Likewise, intellectual parallels can be drawn between journalistic conduct in the 2017 novel and the 2022 code of journalistic ethics, but direct influence of the latter upon the author cannot be alleged [C9].

1.6 Levels of Textual Evidence and the Method of Re-examination

The study specifies three levels of fact. The first is 'explicit in the text': an event, utterance or record clearly mentioned in the original novel, such as the written sequence of Poonam's complaint in Chapter 14, or the distinction between a witness at the scene and hearsay in Chapter 24. The second is 'interpretation derived from the text': an argument reached by comparing several passages, such as reading the circular return of the queue as a figure of civic self-confidence. The third is 'external research context': evidence that may help teachers or readers understand wider questions of labour policy but is not treated as direct proof of the novel's fictional time and place. [P: 14, 24, 59–60]

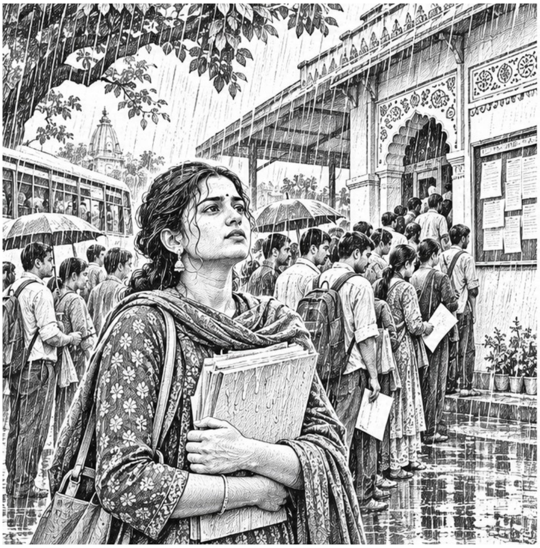
It would be improper to equate the fictional Navgarh with any specific district or state, or with India as a whole, and then fabricate local statistics on that basis. Accordingly, later national reports on employment are not retrospectively imposed upon the novel's story year. By the demanding standards of university research, the present study does not include fieldwork, a critical edition of textual variants, an interview with the author, or a statistical survey. Its object of analysis is the literary text. Interpretations concerning consent, culpability, rehabilitation, grief, caste or marital relations remain confined to the narrative circumstances of the characters.

Chapter 2: Title, Plot and Structural Analysis

2.1 The Multiple Meanings of the Title

The title The City's Other Face does not confine itself to identifying certain criminal inhabitants of the city. One face comprises buildings, employment advertisements, public ceremonies, transport, modern offices and reputations for philanthropy; the other comprises interminable queues of applicants, household expenditure on medicine, unpaid portions of wages, names altered on documents, hazardous journeys and justice still outstanding. The prosperity of one face is not unrelated to the labour and waiting of the other. Revealing this relationship is the title's essential work.

Chapter 1 depicts the Navgarh bus station and an interview at a private institution. Immediately beneath the idealistic maxim 'Success through merit' lie disorderly receipts and a queue of people waiting for photocopies. This distance between language and institutional practice persists until the truthful information notice at the employment centre in the final chapter. The city's 'other' face then becomes not merely the darkness of wrongdoing but also a modest possibility of assistance. The title's strength lies in presenting social inequality as a moral contradiction without altogether foreclosing the possibility of change.



At the employment office: the civic queue and documents of uncertain promise

The word 'other' also conceals a class-relative perspective. What the city's eminent citizens perceive at Ratan Singh's function differs from the world immediately confronting a young woman seeking work, a labourer owed wages, or a wife examining bank documents. By juxtaposing several experiences of the same city, the author demands comparative vision. The title thus continues to acquire significance up to the last page.

2.2 The Five Narrative Cycles

The first part begins with the everyday acquaintances of Naina, her mother Saraswati Devi, her brother Chandan, the journalist Abhay Paswan, Savita and Poonam. Behind the attractive promise of an appointment offered by the 'Nayi Disha Employment Centre', the required deposit, incomplete appointment letter, non-matching registers and peculiar shipping documents gradually generate unease. The initial foreshadowing of harm takes the form of apprehension, incomplete information and uncomfortable questions; the characters do not know the entire criminal network at the outset.

The second part accelerates when Poonam's telephone is switched off. A police complaint, the office's altered name, forged records, Abhay's cautious reporting, fears of dishonour in the village, Naresh's secret accounts, and eventually the discovery of his body beside a canal—all transform a private employment problem into a public and institutional crisis. Naresh's death intensifies the investigative momentum, but the writer resists the temptation to assign guilt immediately.

In the third part the social time after bereavement becomes important. False accusations against Naina; Chandan's silence and debts; Saraswati's ill health; Kiran's admission of an extramarital affair; Vibha's resolve; and Rekha's safeguarding of Naresh's papers distinguish the narrative from a straightforward crime-and-solution plot. Private ethical crises become entangled with public financial crimes, yet their wounds also retain a separate existence.

The fourth part undertakes a painstaking reconstruction of the investigation. Transport registers, an old vehicle, a search of the warehouse, leads involving workers across the border, Poonam's discovery alive, a statement on her own terms, a dishonest offer, Manoj's arrest and Kiran's testimony before a judicial authority form a sequence in which truth emerges not through a miraculous confession but through mutually corroborating evidence. Poonam's survival brings decisive relief, although the psychological and bodily injuries she has suffered remain.

The fifth part does not end abruptly with Ratan's arrest. The circumstances of Naresh's murder are re-examined; the staff of the closed office find themselves unemployed; Vibha and Dinesh confront their respective responsibilities; Abhay tests the limits of responsible reporting; Chandan accepts the legal consequences of his errors; and Naina establishes a centre for reliable employment information. Through the pending court hearing and a fresh queue of jobseekers, the last two chapters show that individual courage cannot immediately abolish a structural crisis.

The regular allocation of twelve chapters to each of the five parts reveals a conspicuous structural discipline. Yet its regularity has a cost: at certain points the repetition of new evidence, new questions and brief moral conclusions renders the movement of the story predictable. Taken as a whole, nevertheless, this design successfully binds fragmented experiences of life into a common narrative.

2.3 The Interrelationships of the Five Parts: Sequence, Crisis and Consequence

The five part-titles constitute a kind of narrative map. In 'The Search for Employment', hope means the immediate desire to obtain work. In 'The Missing People', the insecurity attending that hope becomes concrete in an individual's absence. 'Hatred and Betrayal' reveals not only failures of the external system but questions of fear, culpability and oppression within intimate relationships. In

'The Price of Truth', investigation ceases to signify an emotional declaration of courage and becomes the price paid for written records, testimony and confession. In 'The Survivors', questions of income, medicine, dignity, evidence and tomorrow's queue remain even after the alleged wrongdoer's arrest. The five titles therefore establish not only a causal succession but also an accumulating social meaning.

Rather than ending when 'a disappearance has been solved', the plot moves towards the question, 'What must the survivors do now?' Although the discovery of Poonam alive in the fourth part marks an emotional climax, more than eight chapters remain after it. This extension is not accidental padding: the novel treats rehabilitation, economic compensation, professional responsibility and the repair of relationships as indispensable parts of the story. The characters' lives do not close when a police file is closed. [P: 44–60]

Nevertheless, the division into five regular units of twelve chapters risks a certain mechanical quality. Many chapters end with a silent pledge, a list of tasks for the following day, the reminder that 'evidence remains to be found', or a short question. Such repetitions communicate the discipline of investigation, although at points readers may find the rhythm predictable. A methodologically responsible criticism must acknowledge both possibilities.

2.4 Beginning and Ending: A Comparative Reading of Transformation

In the first chapter the crowd at the bus station and the interview queue are sites of dependent waiting for Naina. She has qualifications, but little control over working hours, remuneration, additional copying work or the ambiguity of an appointment letter. In the final two chapters the city's queues do not diminish; they fill once more. Yet the individual's self-understanding has changed: she has begun to develop an institutional practice of checking the truthfulness of advertisements. The story is thus circular without remaining fixed at precisely the same point: the circumference is unchanged, but the protagonist's capacity to question has expanded. [P: 1, 56, 59–60]

The exchange with Rupa on the final page—'Read the document first. You have the right to ask questions'—resembles a modest public declaration counterposed to the helpless, file-bound body of the first chapter. This declaration has political limits: Naina cannot create employment for millions. Aware of that limit, the novel preserves the ethical significance of individual reform. Its artistic choice is a particularly sensitive form of social hope, not an implausibly happy ending.

The weather, too, provides a language for this tension. At the beginning, rain, soaked papers, mud and sweat signify uncertainty for Naina; at the end, images of the leaves of Phāgun, holy basil and a fresh page suggest continuity. The plaster in the old house, however, is still crumbling. Natural brightness and social deprivation coexist. The novel does not divorce its symbolism from economic reality. [P: 1, 60]

Chapter 3: Characters, Agency and Ethical Conflict

3.1 Naina Mishra

Naina is not an omnipotent heroine in any conventional sense. At the outset, she must make daily decisions amid household expenses, her mother's medication, the need to support her brother's education, low wages and humiliating interviews. Her questions about the appointment letter and remuneration in the first chapter provide an essential clue to her character. She recognises exploitation but does not instantly dismiss an offer of five thousand rupees: she seeks to balance discernment against her actual circumstances of compulsion. This contradiction makes her credible.

Her part in Poonam's ordeal is not simply an expression of selfless emotion. She records the times of messages, preserves the complaint registration number, seeks written responses from officials and examines the documents accompanying letters. Her ethical capacity as protagonist develops through such conduct. What distinguishes her is not instant possession of every answer but her willingness to acknowledge ignorance and persist in seeking answers. Such a heroine presents the possibility of a literate, working and autonomous woman in modern Maithili society.

The false accusation in Chapter 31 subjects this principle to the ordeal of personal suffering. Naina suffers suspension from employment and social isolation; nevertheless, she does not treat 'asking questions' as a mere idealistic slogan but pays an economic price for it. When she later refuses a dishonest offer in Chapter 46, she knows that her family's expenses remain precarious. Fidelity to truth thus becomes courageous conduct, not an option available only to the comfortably secure.

Her establishment of an employment assistance centre in the final part is the fitting outcome of that development. The centre's capacities are nevertheless restricted: it can provide verified information and clear explanations of fees, not guaranteed appointments. Naina does not conceal this limitation beneath promotional rhetoric. Her transformation therefore remains plausible. The protagonist's achievement moves beyond the problem of her own livelihood towards enabling others to examine advertisements and terms of employment critically.

3.2 Poonam Yadav

Poonam initially appears as an enthusiastic applicant. Depositing money in hope of employment, trusting her family, and travelling to an unfamiliar place do not make her a fool; they make her an ordinary person taking decisions within a precarious labour market. Her final message in Chapter 12 generates dread, yet the author does not erase her privacy by turning her absence into a sensational puzzle. Family grief, rumours in the village and administrative delays in the search gradually expose the social consequences of Poonam's absence.

Poonam is found in Chapters 43–45, but her discovery does not mean that 'everything is all right'. She is permitted to choose the day on which to give her statement, her right to rest is recognised, and social assistance depends upon her consent. In this respect the title 'Testimony of the Wound' is particularly exact: the experience of injury can become evidence, but an injured person is not merely a receptacle for evidence. Her fear, sleep, health and future work possess independent value.

In the final chapter Poonam helps with information services two days a week; her name is placed on a board only with her permission, and remuneration is fixed. This small episode crystallises the novel's ethics of labour. If sympathy becomes another form of unpaid work, it merely opens a new avenue of exploitation. Recognising the value of Poonam's labour counters that danger. Her participation in the wedding festivities is also limited in duration according to her wishes; the right of a victim to establish her own boundaries remains intact.

3.3 Chandan

Chandan's preparation for competitive examinations represents more than private ambition. Application charges, travel costs, books, cancelled examinations and uncertain results burden the family economy. His modest earnings from warehouse work emerge as an alternative under these pressures. Although he suspects that the transport operations may be unlawful, Chandan repeatedly oscillates between necessity and courage. The author does not exonerate him completely: the possibility of describing his conduct as a 'mistake' remains open to the reader through the end.

The incomplete transport papers in Chapter 11, his breaking of silence in Chapter 27, the mire of debt in Chapter 32 and his decision in Chapter 55 to attend legal proceedings constitute an ethical arc. Chandan's sense of guilt, insecure work and outstanding debts are interconnected; poverty, however, does not excuse every mistaken decision. Here the novel's thinking is balanced. It identifies failures of society while maintaining the place of individual responsibility.

Chandan's tragedy differs from Naina's: she demands documents, whereas her brother sometimes enters dangerous work without adequate papers. This contrast between brother and sister might have become didactic, but their shared domestic pressures help us understand the mental condition of each. In the end he submits to legal process without fleeing. That is a sign of ethical maturity, not proof of innocence.

3.4 Saraswati Devi

Saraswati Devi's household account book is among the novel's smallest but most incisive objects. Rice, oil, lentils, electricity, medicine, roof repairs and bus fares: these figures do not diminish a human being but reveal the actual burden of daily labour. Kitchen smoke, the sewing machine and packets of medicine evoke that field of women's work to which institutions seldom accord recognition as

'labour'. Saraswati worries about her children, yet she also speaks the practical language of labour rights, recognising the 'value of the body' and the need for an appointment letter.

The experience of Madhavi Devi brings into view the effects of illicit alcohol, unstable wages and domestic violence. The writer records both the initial relief afforded by new restrictions and the crisis following the return of illegal sales. The central issue is not the success or failure of a political proclamation but women's safety at night, children's schooling, and the breakdown of trust within savings groups. The effects of law are thus tested against the concrete experience of the household.

Madhavi's circumstances reveal intersecting forms of exploitation: violence at home, earnings dissipated through intoxication, deductions by her employer for arriving late, and public stigma. She is not merely a supporting character whose role is to illuminate someone else's suffering. Through her own experience she becomes an informal archive of labour and political truth. Her warning to verify employment charges in advance also foreshadows the principal plot.

3.5 Abhay Paswan

Abhay is a reporter, but he is not constructed as an omniscient exposer of wrongdoing. He sometimes acknowledges inadequate information, inspects documents, seeks responses from officials and insists that the accused party's account also be considered. His closeness to Naina does not override the privacy ethics of journalism. Their conversation in Chapter 3—that certain information is given in confidence, not for publication—contains the seed of the whole journalistic strand.

The threat against him in Chapter 21 raises the genuine risks of journalism, but his courage is not equivalent to reckless haste in printing a story. In Chapter 54, his refusal to publish Poonam's image, his issuing of a correction, the inclusion of information about services for victims, and his distinction between allegation and conclusion together constitute an ethic combining public interest with human dignity. The insistence on verification and privacy in the Press Council of India's available ethical code provides a context for this textually grounded reading of the character [C9].

Abhay's marriage to Naina raises questions of caste difference and the division of care work within families. The value of their relationship lies not only in an acceptance of love but in care for elderly members of both families, continuation of the woman's work, and a considered response to social opposition. The romantic strand thereby becomes part of the novel's dialogue concerning social justice.

3.6 Kiran and Dinesh

Kiran is an office manager. She knows of several incomplete procedures, signs some of the relevant documents, and becomes involved in an extramarital

relationship with Ratan. This relationship destroys trust within her marriage, while the institutional hierarchy and ambiguities in office records expose her to personal insecurity. The writer does not present Kiran as a one-dimensional villain: both her explicit admission of wrongdoing and her later decision to supply independent records are represented.

Dinesh's suffering is real, but the rage of an injured husband is not accepted as a licence to act unethically. In Chapter 53, his acknowledgement of his own errors, debts and threats shows that violence against another person should not be the answer to betrayal. This narrative strand suggests the possibility of accountability rather than simply forgiveness. A relationship may end, but the tasks of preserving self-respect and responding lawfully remain.

Vibha Singh is Ratan's wife. Her inquiry does not end with the question 'Has my husband deceived me?' It extends to transactions carried out in her name, financial consent, her daughter's security and her own future livelihood. The comforts of a wealthy household do not confer complete independence upon her: this is a significant enlargement of the novel's treatment of women. In Chapters 41 and 52, obtaining bank records, deciding to live separately and seeking opportunities for work constitute a reconstruction of her independent personhood.

The author deliberately acknowledges Ratan's public donations and his genuinely useful contribution to a school in Chapter 9. It would therefore be too easy to reduce his misconduct to the proposition that every public act of his was fraudulent. The problem is that genuine assistance may become a protective shield of reputation that slows scrutiny of corrupt practices. This duality gives the character relative complexity, although his inward life is sometimes less fully explored than the documentary and administrative manifestations of his power.

3.7 Naresh Mandal

Naresh appears as a person responsible for office accounts. Danger to his life does not instantly elevate him into a heroic figure; he begins as an ordinary employee who questions inconsistent receipts, altered dates and responsibility for payment. The decisive fact in Chapter 22 is that, having raised his questions in writing, he cannot easily disown what he has said. His death in Chapter 23 moves beyond the familiar public clamour to pose a question about the price of conscientious labour.

Rekha is Naresh's sister. Rather than trying to solve the mystery of the murder immediately, she chooses to preserve material memory, retrieve accounts from a private bundle and place facts before officials. Her contribution in Chapter 36 establishes that a chain of evidence may survive not only on a police desk but in the neglected cupboard of a home. In the courtroom chapter, Naresh's sheet and his child's mathematics notebook prevent the dead man from being reduced to a statistical case.

Rekha's and Seema's (Naresh's wife's) difficulties are not confined to court dates: school fees, daily meals and the absence of income also confront them. The author makes clear that legal justice and social-economic justice are separate stages. Respect for the deceased begins with the wish to establish the circumstances of his killing, but advances towards fulfilment only through the continued lives of those he leaves behind.

3.8 Sujata Kumari

Inspector Sujata Kumari introduces a measured investigative perspective. At the outset she insists on distinguishing the account of a direct witness at the scene from that of a person repeating rumours (Chapter 24). Correlating times, contacts, vehicles, original registers, medical reports and bank transactions is fundamental to her method. Consequently, the excitement of the crime narrative develops beyond the question of identifying a culprit into the harder question of how an accusation can be reliably substantiated.

In Chapters 37–42, verification of an old vehicle and the lead across a border could have seemed like dramatic coincidence, but Sujata repeatedly demands independent corroboration. Even when Chapter 50 is titled 'The Truth of the Murder', the narrative does not substitute itself for a final judicial finding: the sequence of events, medical timing and contradictory accounts are under renewed examination. To describe this unresolved evidentiary procedure as a complete, court-proven solution to the murder mystery would misrepresent the text.

Sujata represents an ideal of institutional competence, but the ideal has limits. The initial indifference of the police station, influential personal connections and constraints of administrative resources remain present in the background. Some readers may find the inquiry too orderly, documentary and close to an ethical ideal. Nevertheless, the novel's avowed commitment is to prevent unsupported accusations, and measured against that principle Sujata's restraint is an important artistic choice.

3.9 The Interdependence of the Characters and the Cost of Decisions

Naina, Poonam, Rekha, Vibha and Kiran cannot be compressed into a single ideal figure of the 'empowered woman'. Naina's way towards public assistance grows from her education; Poonam's self-determination requires safe rest first; Rekha's labour rescues evidence from objects of familial memory; Vibha seeks authority over what has been done in her own name at the bank; Kiran risks acknowledging the difference between consent, signature and pressure. Power is not the same thing for all of them: for one it means saying 'no'; for another, 'I will not speak yet'; for another, asking 'What transactions were made in my name?' [P: 36, 41, 45, 48, 52, 56]

Abhay and Sujata exemplify distinct methods of non-state and state verification. A journalist has a public obligation to publish relevant information; an inspector requires an impartial chain of inquiry and evidence admissible in court. Their

functions are not interchangeable. Thus Abhay's 'news' lends ethical support to the search for Poonam without itself determining her whereabouts. Sujata examines documents without dismissing the family's emotions as irrelevant. Their distinction becomes a complex narrative dialogue between administration and the democratic public sphere. [P: 17, 24, 44, 54]

Ratan, Manoj, Dinesh and Chandan, on the other hand, do not occupy equivalent positions. One exploits institutional advantage as a protective cover; another makes unjust decisions in the anger of a broken relationship; another becomes implicated in misconduct under economic constraint. Causal circumstance does not automatically absolve guilt, just as ethical transformation does not automatically terminate a prosecution. The novel shows the social production of error while preserving personal accountability. This balance prevents its characters from collapsing into a mechanical clash of paragons and villains.

Chapter 4: Employment, Society and Institutional Inequality

4.1 Social Class, Caste and Marriage

The characters' names, work and family circumstances establish the novel's social plurality. Naina Mishra's household struggles with a shortage of money; Abhay Paswan practises journalism; Poonam Yadav's family risks its savings in hope of employment; and Gokul Sahni's direct experience becomes significant to the criminal investigation. Their insecurity neither arises from one common cause nor exists alongside equal social standing. Such diversity gives the city's class divisions a more credible form.

The 'Opposition to the Marriage' in Chapter 57 brings the novel's public morality to the doorstep of intimate relationships. Family objections to Naina's marriage with Abhay raise questions of caste, honour, income and the woman's future employment. Naina does not humiliate those who object but will not relinquish her right to decide. The distinction of this episode is that marriage becomes not only a matter of emotional assent but also an occasion for open discussion of elderly parents' care, economic partnership and professional freedom.

Critical caution remains necessary, however. The novel brings individual resistance to caste prejudice to life, but the comprehensive analysis of caste-related landholding, access to institutions, political organisation or long histories of domination does not constitute its central plot. It shows the moral courage of an inter-caste relationship; it would be improper to infer that this courage abolishes the wider caste structure of society. Here lie both an important achievement and a comparatively undeveloped dimension of the work.

4.2 Employment and Freedom

In her first interview Naina receives an offer of five thousand rupees for long hours of work under unclear terms of appointment. Acceptance or rejection does

not depend solely upon a 'desire to work': it also depends upon diminished alternative income, transport expenses, bodily security, her mother's treatment and the distribution of household tasks. This situation can be interpreted in terms of the capabilities approach: opportunity is not merely the existence of a position on paper but the substantive capacity to make a dignified choice [C5–C6].

Chandan's problem is not limited to competitive examinations. Repeated applications, fees, changing examination venues, cancelled examinations, loans, temporary warehouse work and delayed wages all represent the wider social cost of unemployment. Instability of information is another obstacle in Savita's life. Although employment is an essential source of regular income, it is not an unblemished form of liberation in the narrative: an unscrupulous institution transforms the name of employment into an instrument of exploitation.

The 2024 report by the International Labour Organization and the Institute for Human Development systematically raises questions concerning India's educated young people's employment crisis, informal work, the quality of earnings and gender disparities [C7]. This later report provides no statistics specific to the novel's fictional Navgarh. It does, nevertheless, offer a useful perspective from which to understand the continuing relevance of problems the novel represented imaginatively in 2017.

At the conclusion, Naina's assistance centre refuses to promise 'guaranteed appointments'. This modest change is the novel's practical proposal for economic reform: information should be verified; fees should be transparent; workers should receive dignified payment; and where an answer is not known, a false answer should not be manufactured for sale. These are practical measures on a personal and local scale, not a claim to have solved the national problem of employment.

4.3 Labour Exploitation

Poonam's story includes descriptions of a false promise of appointment, uncertainty about the actual workplace, restrictions on movement, control of labour and fear. It therefore suggests practices of exploitation comparable to those examined under international concepts of trafficking in persons. Authoritative United Nations explanations require separate scrutiny of recruitment, transfer or harbouring for exploitation by deception, force, intimidation or abuse of vulnerability [C8].

For literary criticism the distinction between 'indications of exploitation' and 'established legal criminality' is decisive. For a long time characters struggle to reach concealed workplaces; the police require substantiation for each allegation during evidence gathering. It would therefore be wrong to declare the trafficking charge 'proved' without analysis or to treat Naresh's death as the established final result of trafficking from the beginning. The text cannot replace a legal finding.

The ILO's discussion of indicators of forced labour treats fear, coercive control and the effective absence of voluntary consent as signs requiring investigation [C10]. This external concept helps to explain the ethical structure of Poonam's story, but the narrative's legal outcome cannot be established simply by invoking a theoretical source. The author's achievement lies in refusing to turn Poonam's life into sensational material.

4.4 Reputation and Power

In Chapter 9, actual students benefit from Ratan's support; the text does not permit the easy conclusion that 'all charity is a display'. The prominence of Ratan's name on a school platform, a desk for employment advice and the presence of a construction contractor together establish a circle of social honour in which an ordinary applicant might lose the courage to question documents behind the scenes. Reputation becomes harmful when it takes the place of accountability.

Construction work associated with Virendra Rai, warehouse transport, multiple registrations and unpaid staff wages form an economic network within the story. Yet the writer does not treat a photograph taken with someone or an acquaintance as sufficient evidence of criminality. Financial power, public image and administrative prestige appear here as elements of a social crisis.

The critical limitation of this strand is equally important. The actual economic organisation of such an extensive network of influence, the flow of loans and the social history of political patronage appear more often through inventories of evidence than through sustained human scenes. Thus, although the narrative architecture of accusation remains coherent, a deeper causal account of the wider structure could have made its image of political economy more incisive.

4.5 The Household Economy: Care, Time and the Invisible Value of Work

Saraswati's account book is among the novel's most complex objects of microeconomics. Medicine, lentils, bus fares, application fees, electricity and roof repairs each have a separate recorded price, yet every expense is bound to the others. Economic scarcity need not mean that total income is zero; it also means unbearable choices among necessities. When Naina considers the five-thousand-rupee job, she calculates the possible loss of tuition income and the cost of leaving her mother alone at home. In this accounting, time itself is a kind of scarcity. [P: 1–2]

The domestic ledger: household care and the costs of precarious employment

The presence of illegally sold alcohol in Madhavi's household is not simply material for propaganda about the success or failure of government. Initial relief, the subsequent covert trade, shame imposed on her daughter, deductions from the woman's wages and fear of violence together show the distance that may persist between a legal proclamation and enduring safety at home. The narrative places the injured family's voice at its centre; it cannot be converted into an empirical evaluation of policy outcomes across an entire state. [P: 2–3, 18]

The expenses of Naresh's household and the question of Poonam's work after rehabilitation carry the household economy into the novel's concluding sections. Meals and school fees are not postponed simply because a court date has been adjourned. Even with faith in an ideal justice system, unpaid accounts in everyday life press forward. The work thus moves beyond abstract arguments concerning rights towards the question, 'Who will bear the costs of exercising those rights?' [P: 49–51, 58]

4.6 Employment Fraud and Women's Mobility: Double Insecurity

The possibility of a job away from home appeals to Poonam because of the family's poverty. The wish to work elsewhere is not itself a fault. The fault belongs to a system that transforms economic aspiration into a web of debt, travel, identity documents, altered conditions and surveillance. Fear of dishonour in the village imposes a second burden upon the victim. On the one hand, a family sends its daughter away in hope of work; on the other, when misfortune occurs, society tends to hold the daughter responsible. [P: 5, 12–18]

After Poonam is brought to safety, her wish to 'telephone my mother' and her freedom to pause an interview constitute an important ethical turning point.

This portrayal exceeds the passive image of the 'rescued woman'. The injured person retains the right to decide; she is not merely the subject of a conversation but helps determine its conditions. Her subsequent undertaking of limited paid work illuminates the complex economic meaning of rehabilitation. [P: 44–45, 60]

This narrative strand can be compared with international definitions of trafficking and forced labour, but three matters must first be distinguished: recruitment and travel; the means of deception or coercion; and the purpose of exploitation. The narrated events provide several such indicators; they permit literary interpretation, not judicial conviction. The distinction strengthens the credibility of the discussion. [C8, C10]

4.7 The Novel's Historical Moment and Subsequent Employment Research

Publication details identify 2017 as the year of the first edition. The ILO–Institute for Human Development India Employment Report 2024 is a later publication. It situates educated youth unemployment, employment quality and gender disparities in a broad India-wide perspective [C7]. A comparative dialogue between that report and the novel is legitimate; inferring a particular unemployment percentage for 'Navgarh in 2017' from the 2024 national findings would be a logical error.

The story produces knowledge of social precarity different in kind from statistical averages. A survey asks 'how many'; the novel asks 'how does an event unfold in the life of one family?' The two approaches can complement one another; neither should be treated as a substitute for the other. An unemployed young woman's bus fare, a student's cancelled examination, domestic sewing and a fraudulent receipt exemplify this fine-grained experience.

Chapter 5: Narratology, Language and the System of Symbols

5.1 Narrative Perspective

The story is predominantly narrated in the third person, but the focalisation shifts as it moves closer to the experiences of different characters. Initially we enter Naina's fatigue, anxiety and questioning; later Chandan's fear of debt, Kiran's guilt, Vibha's inward conflict, Naresh's decision, Rekha's grief, Sujata's disciplined inquiry and Abhay's editorial dilemma become distinct centres. No single character knows all the facts; the reader, too, gradually assembles partial indications.

Read through Genette's theory of focalisation, the novel constructs an overall situation out of multiple limited experiences rather than through the testimony of one unchanging narrator [C3]. This choice serves the unfolding mystery and permits the separate ethical worlds of accused, victim and family to appear. Nevertheless, the narrator occasionally states conclusions explicitly at the end of

chapters, somewhat diminishing the reader's space for independent interpretation.

The sequence in which scenes are distributed has considerable effect. A question posed in the employment office acquires another meaning in Chandan's warehouse; Naresh's notebook becomes a different history in Rekha's home; a journalist's report may constitute only a fragment of the evidence placed before a court. Meaning is not complete in one character's monologue; it is constructed by joining pieces of mutually incomplete knowledge. This multicentred form strengthens the novel's representation of collective social reality.

5.2 Dialogue and Polyphony

Recalling Bakhtin's theory of polyphony, we may observe that Naina's cautious questioning, Poonam's hopeful voice, Saraswati's domestic discernment, Savita's fatigue with examinations, Chandan's bitter rejoinders, Abhay's evidentiary principles, Dinesh's hurt and Vibha's language of rights do not occupy a uniform verbal register [C4]. Different forms of labour, class, gender, memory and social crisis stand behind these voices.

It is also important that the novel does not construct a single flawless embodiment of good judgment. Naina is sometimes afraid; a journalist's report cannot instantly make Poonam safe; painstaking police work takes time; Saraswati Devi does not always approve entirely of her children's decisions; and Ratan's donations, though genuine, do not protect his personal and managerial conduct from scrutiny. Without these internal contradictions the book might have become an uncomplicated moral tract.

The dialogue nevertheless invites criticism because many characters speak with an extraordinarily steady concern for legal and documentary caution. The insistence that one report only what one has directly seen, and avoid allegations without proof, recurs at many decisive moments. The repetition gives conceptual unity but sometimes reduces the linguistic difference among individual characters. More room for untrained everyday speech and unexpected silence might have deepened the emotional experience of certain exchanges.

5.3 Temporal Arrangement

The final chapter identifies the novel's temporal movement from the rainy bus station at the beginning to the concluding month of Phāgun as a journey of approximately a year and a half. Event-time and experienced time diverge: four hours of an interview, a month's wait for results, a night with a switched-off telephone, a postponed court date and the need to buy tomorrow's medicine all pass at different experiential speeds. The narrator frequently offers dates recorded on documents as external confirmation, but the prolongation of anxiety makes waiting seem longer.

A repeated pattern of events may be observed: application, paper, queue, official and application again. This circularity articulates the structural character of

unemployment. Yet the search for Poonam, Naresh's murder and the decision to marry do not constitute a single unchanging cycle. They are irreversible events through which the characters' self-understanding changes. The narrative's underlying tension lies between recurrent social crisis and individual lives moving in one direction.

The road queue in the first chapter and the returning queue in Chapter 59 do more than repeat a metaphor: they testify to concrete social immobility. Yet in Chapter 60 Naina takes Rupa along with her. The city's cycle remains much as before, while the character's response has changed. The conclusion is therefore less a final answer than the beginning of another question.

5.4 The Chronotope

Navgarh's bus station is a public site of waiting. The home is a space of limited resources and reciprocal care; the 'Nayi Disha' office is the other face of false assurances and written procedures; the warehouse embodies informal labour and obscure transport; the canal signifies death and unanswered questions; the police station and court are sites of evidence and prolonged institutional time. The characters' constant movement among these spaces makes their insecurity visible.

In the light of Bakhtin's account of the chronotope, the queue at the bus station and the corridor of the court impart physical form to the temporality of 'waiting' [C4]. A few remaining rupees in a small purse, muddy roads, worn sandals, an unfinished building, a closed gate, a lock and a mat laid out in a corridor prevent place from becoming mere decoration. They form a visual grammar of the character's social position.

One limit of the spatial arrangement is that certain destinations for outside appointments, cross-border routes and the wider geography of labour recruitment remain indistinct, whether deliberately or for reasons internal to the plot. Such obscurity is productive of suspense. For a critique claiming to describe extensive social realities, however, the question remains how fully the actual spatial organisation of cross-border institutions and local networks has been represented.

5.5 Object-Symbols

Naina's file symbolises her qualifications, her family's sacrifices and the uncertainty of opportunity. The expenditure involved in obtaining certificates and the time needed to correct a single letter of a name demonstrate that the document itself is a product of social labour. A receipt may substantiate a truth, but one improperly produced may also become an instrument of betrayal. The duality makes the novel's language of objects complex.

The fact that Poonam's mobile telephone remains 'switched off' becomes an exceptionally painful sign of her absence. The same medium circulates false allegations, carries threats, enables the journalist to collect information and

permits families to seek assistance. Communication technology is therefore neither a saviour nor an enemy in itself. The ethics of its use and of information verification are decisive.

The notebook mediates between personal memory and public evidence. Saraswati's household ledger, Naresh's account book, Chandan's list of outstanding debts, Naina's written questions and the new page in the last chapter all produce parallel meanings of 'reckoning' at different levels. Financial, ethical, biographical and judicial accounts remain distinct while becoming mutually entangled.

5.6 Language and Rhythm

The work's Maithili prose flows from everyday practice. The kitchen at home, the crowd on the bus, interview questions, workers' speech, bank slips and court offices are all presented through ordinary, concrete materials. The prose's strength lies not in an abundance of ornament but in the minute details of rent calculations, food containers, the cost of medicine and perspiration. Its clarity allows readers to understand a situation before yielding to an emotional reaction to the social event.

Many chapters end with a short conceptual proposition, a new question or a decision written down. Such endings sustain continuity in serial reading and make readers await the next development. When employed too consistently, however, this technique allows the narrator to explain a scene before it has been permitted to generate its own meaning. After a complex experience, for instance, a character's recording of a moral conclusion in a notebook can sometimes be a beautiful detail and sometimes a predictable formal device.

Devakanta Jha's literary history, with its separate discussion of the modern Maithili novel, and Jayakant Mishra's history provide useful contexts for a wider account of Maithili literature [C1–C2]. This study, however, does not claim to have undertaken a comparative reading of the complete texts of those volumes: it draws references only from accessible bibliographic records and descriptions. A more adequate demonstration of this novel's distinctive position will require direct comparison with other contemporary Maithili novels.

5.7 The Narrative Grammar of Material Evidence

Applications, attendance registers, appointment letters, receipts, bank statements, telephone messages and the next court date are not decorative objects in this plot. The narrative advances whenever a discrepancy emerges between one document and another. Evidence is thus both a 'sign' and an 'action'. In Chapter 1 the file is a condition of social entry; in Chapter 5 the receipt symbolises hope; in Chapters 15–16 a changed name enables deception; in Chapter 36 Naresh's notebook moves from memorial object to investigative material; and in Chapter 48 Kiran's signature becomes an object of accountability. [P: 1, 5, 15–16, 36, 48]

The main proposition of this chain of objects is not that paper is the supreme truth. The text repeatedly shows that a letter bearing the correct seal may tell a lie, and that even an original document remains incomplete without the appropriate context. 'Possession of a document', 'authenticity of the document', 'correct understanding of its meaning' and 'proof acceptable to a court' are four distinct conditions. The author turns these differences into dramatic instruments. In a sense, the narrative also teaches readers how to read responsibly: examine what is written, verify its source, and do not circulate as fact what you do not know.

When Naina establishes the rule that her assistance centre will circulate only verified information, the reader sees a narrative object-symbol transformed into institutional conduct. The history told by receipts, boards and registers moves from imperfect education towards the discipline of public service. Their significance cannot therefore be detached from the relationship between the novel's beginning and ending. [P: 56, 59–60]

5.8 The Distribution of Knowledge, Delay and Readerly Participation

The novel advances its mystery through the suspension of information but does not confer a semblance of omniscience upon the reader at every turn. Poonam is on the other side of a disconnected telephone; Naina, the family and the police receive different information at different moments. Discovering a few lines in a secret account does not automatically reveal the entire criminal network. In this delay the reader shares the characters' impatience. The narrative moves between two questions: 'When will an answer be found?' and 'How trustworthy is the answer that has been found?' [P: 12–17, 35–45]

Genette's distinctions enable us to examine the relationship between the time an event takes to occur and the amount of narrative time devoted to telling it. Everyday waits for work occupy many pages, while journeys extending over months may be condensed into recollection. Death takes place in an instant, but the attempt to understand it occupies many chapters. This unevenness is not merely a technique of crime fiction; it expresses the social duration of grief. For a family after a murder, time does not follow the movement of a clock. Hence the next court date collides with the question of tomorrow's ration at home. [C3; P: 24–36, 50, 58]

A weakness of this narrative method deserves notice. Where characters themselves explain the ethical meaning of each decision, the reader's scope for independent interpretation may contract. The strongest moments are those in which an object or a silence produces meaning unaided: Naresh's old sheet, Poonam's first conversation with her mother, or the fresh notebook page at the end. At such moments the novel presents a scene rather than a sermon. [P: 44, 58, 60]

Chapter 6: Truth, Evidence, Trauma and Justice

6.1 Trauma and Human Dignity

Compassion for the story's victims repeatedly takes the form of concrete action: seeking permission before publishing Poonam's name or photograph, allowing her to choose the time for meetings, obtaining medical help, securing conversations with her family, paying her for work, and respecting her freedom to attend or stay away from a public gathering. In these episodes compassion is not one-sided pity but a process of restoring to the victim the authority to decide.

The title of the last part, 'The Survivors', is consequently poignant. Mere physical survival is not a complete recovery of life. Justice still incomplete for Naresh's family, Vibha's financial uncertainty, Dinesh's personal remorse, Chandan's fear of prosecution, Poonam's traumatic memories and the limited assistance offered by Naina and Savita all indicate that those who live require continuing resources, relationships and social respect.

These episodes can be considered alongside Nussbaum's understanding of women's capacity for choice [C6]. It would, however, also be wrong to reduce the victim's experience to an illustration of one philosophical theory. The scene in which Poonam purchases medicine for her mother with her first wages is sufficiently rich in its own literary meaning: she emerges from a narrative of grief and re-enters the world of her labour and relationships.

6.2 Legal, Ethical and Public Truth

In this novel 'truth' is not a talisman that can be found once and for all. Domestic ethical truth—Kiran's admission of her relationship, the question of Dinesh's threats, Chandan's mistakes—requires personal accountability. The truth of office accounts—Naresh's registers, Vibha's bank details, wages owed to Kusum—requires institutional records. Legal truth concerning murder, coerced labour and financial crime demands independent verification, cross-examination and time. Public truth in journalism requires careful corroboration before publication.

Awareness of these different paths towards truth raises the novel above the machinery of a crime plot driven merely by coincidences. Confession does not establish guilt in law; popular clamour does not constitute journalistic proof; arrest is not a judicial judgment; and the safety of a victim is not exhausted by the usefulness of her testimony. These distinctions are profound principles of literary ethics.

An opposite risk also deserves consideration: a love of evidence may suppress the narrative's emotional eruptions. Naresh's memorial gathering, a night in hospital with the mother, the encounter with Poonam, and the wedding ceremony provide emotional intervals within this rigorous, document-dominated world. Readers who seek greater inward psychological complexity

may feel that some decisions are reached too quickly and calmly. This is a genuine formal limitation of the novel's artistic choices.

6.3 Journalism and Investigation: Two Different Public Responsibilities

In his role as reporter, Abhay Paswan continually faces the question of whose life a published story will affect. Printing insufficiently corroborated allegations and remaining silent until all evidence is gathered each carries risks. The attempt to avoid fragmentary information in Chapter 17, the threats in Chapter 21 and the decision in Chapter 54 not to publish Poonam's image form a sequence of journalistic ethics. The standard for responsible news is not simply the excitement of an event, but the reliability of facts and the dignity of persons. [P: 17, 21, 54]

Inspector Sujata's method requires independent correlation of direct information from the scene, separate witnesses' statements, medical examinations, bank documents and vehicle-related timelines. Here an ethical elegance of judicial procedure inheres in the novel's apparently ordinary dialogue: however compelling an inference may be, it cannot stand in for evidence. Therefore the necessity of making allegations against powerful figures is matched by the necessity of avoiding wrongful allegations. Sujata gives readers the image of a responsible investigator, although not every official in the novel's administrative world is as competent as she is. [P: 14, 24, 37–50]

The chain of evidence: witnesses, journalism, and a disciplined inquiry

The coexistence of journalism and policing does not amount to a convenient alliance. The journalist brings suspicions to public notice; the police gather evidence. Premature publication of every detail of an inquiry could endanger victims. The Press Council's 2022 norms provide a useful external context in

which to assess these characters' conduct, but since they postdate the novel's first edition they are not posited as a historical stimulus to its composition. [C9]

6.4 Arrest, Judicial Process and the Incompleteness of Repair

The arrest in Chapter 49 seems a symbolic victory, but applicants standing outside the office gate with receipts for unreturned deposits immediately establish its limits. Ratan has been arrested, yet outstanding workers' wages and applicants' money do not instantly come back. Chapter 50 re-examines the proper sequence of events leading to Naresh's death, while Chapter 58 records another date for the hearing. Allegation, arrest, prosecution, corroboration and final judicial determination thus emerge as distinct stages. [P: 49–50, 58]

The novel represents the wider ethical obligation of this process through domestic spaces. Rekha's sheet, the education of Naresh's child, Seema's daily meals, Poonam's treatment, Chandan's new work and Vibha's financial records all belong to lives that exist beyond the crime. If justice is reduced to punishment alone, the lives of survivors remain unanswered questions. The novel offers an artistic reflection upon the difference between an institution that delivers judicial decisions and the gradual work of social reconstruction.

One limitation of the work is that the technical details of judicial procedure are not presented at great length. Readers clearly perceive the ethical standards of investigation, but the complicated duration of a real trial, the burden of prosecution, legal aid and the entire process of victim compensation cannot be contained in the story's limited scope. External legal research would be required to establish whether such omissions are factual flaws in the crime narrative. Literary criticism may properly observe that the form inclines towards an idealised view of institutions.

Chapter 7: Critical Evaluation and Conclusion

7.1 Testing the Artistic Achievements and Limitations

The work presents unemployment as a matter of institutional disorder rather than personal idleness; its women are decision-making persons, not mere dependants; it represents both journalistic freedom and ethical restraint; it does not treat police and judicial work as miraculous solutions; and it assigns rehabilitation a human significance separate from the exposure of crime. The quiet or minimally voiced presences of Naresh's sister, Madhavi, Kusum, Savita and Poonam expand the narrative's social range.

The regularity of the plot's construction, material detail of places, recurrent notebook motif, relation between queues at the beginning and ending, and open conclusion are its principal formal strengths. Its acknowledgment of Ratan's genuine philanthropy, Kiran's dilemma and Chandan's errors partly disrupts a black-and-white morality. The 'new employment assistance centre' emphatically

does not solve society's entire problem; such authorial restraint contributes to the novel's artistic standing.

Its limitations must be named plainly. First, many chapters end on a similar ethical maxim, lending the prose an occasionally didactic quality. Second, repeated verification of documents strengthens the investigation's credibility but slows the narrative rhythm. Third, some secondary male characters receive relatively little inward development of their desire for power, fear and ideological opposition. Fourth, the economic geography of the cross-border exploitation network and the full causal account of its institutional formation remain unanswered. Fifth, the language of evidence employed by most reflective characters tends towards a uniform ethical discipline.

Despite these limits, the contrast between helplessness at the beginning and restricted but real activity at the end is effective. The writer does not reform the city through a great hero. Through the notebooks, receipts, fears, labour, affections and questions of a dozen ordinary people, he redefines the minimum conditions of a just life. In this fundamental achievement The City's Other Face becomes a significant literary representation of contemporary social reality.

7.2 Counter-Readings: Other Interpretations of the Novel

One possible counterargument is that the novel's repeated insistence on verification displaces artistic uncertainty with the style of a moral textbook. Many exchanges are shaped so that characters themselves pronounce sententious truths. Criticism should not dismiss the charge lightly. Yet one must also recognise the non-didactic scenes the work creates from letters, receipts, erroneous registers, Naresh's sheet and public queues. A proper evaluation therefore cannot declare the whole book either 'entirely didactic' or 'entirely polyphonic'; it must consider individual scenes.

According to a second counter-reading, Naina's establishment of an assistance centre allows her to emerge from vast structural failure rather too neatly; given the scarcity of financial resources, her idealism may strike some readers as improbable. The novel itself qualifies this objection. Naina keeps a ledger of expenses, confronts the problem of paying rent, promises no guaranteed appointments, and continues to attend interviews herself. This is not a comprehensive solution but a limited community service. Criticism must respect the limits the story establishes for itself. [P: 56, 59–60]

A third objection is that the work insufficiently explores the deep historical structures of caste and class because opposition to the marriage is largely confined to familial discussion. This observation has substance. The novel does not narrate the whole history of untouchability, land rights, affirmative-action policies or political representation. Rather, it introduces caste questions into specific complexities of labour, mistrust, reputation and marriage. One may acknowledge the importance of what it accomplishes while opening the way for further research into what it leaves unexplored. [P: 57]

7.3 Seven Propositions Arising from the Research

(1) The title's 'other face' refers not merely to the hidden shadow of criminality but to the unequal distribution of hopes grounded in employment. (2) The 'queue' is a metaphor for social time; its return reveals the persistence of collective crisis. (3) A 'document' is not fixed truth: its evidentiary value depends on signature, context, date and independent corroboration. (4) Women characters gain different forms of secure decision-making rather than repeating the story of one ideal woman. (5) Journalism, policing, courts and domestic labour cannot take one another's place: they confront the same social crisis through different responsibilities. (6) A victim's survival is welcome, but questions of rehabilitation and economic justice continue after it. (7) Naina moves from personal insecurity in employment towards public verification; she acquires capability, not the power to reform society in its entirety.

These propositions are not intended to proclaim a grand theory but to invite readers to return to the original chapters and test them. Any conclusion that fails to correspond to its originating scene remains open to revision. This principle of self-correction is implicit in the demand for evidentiary scrutiny that recurs throughout the work.

7.4 Conclusion: The Literary Meaning of the Right to Question

At the beginning, Naina stands in a queue in pursuit of employment; at the end, she teaches Rupa to scrutinise fees, conditions and the source of appointments. Development here means more than personal advancement: it is the acquisition, within an imperfect social order, of an ability to reduce harm to another person. This small gain seems substantial because the text creates no illusion of total victory. Unpaid wages, Naresh's case, related investigations, Poonam's health and the city's newly unemployed people all remain unresolved questions.

The city's other face is not merely 'hidden': it stands in queues every day. People see it, but the meaning of seeing changes. Hearing an injustice as a rumour is quite different from understanding its documentary history, social causes and human consequences. The novel makes readers aware of that difference. Its highest literary achievement is not the solution of a crime puzzle but the insistence that human dignity remain inviolate throughout the process of investigating it.

The study's conclusion is not that the novel exhausts every possibility of novelistic art. Rather, it demonstrates how modern Maithili social prose may become a powerful space for public judgment. The employment queue exists not only for bread, but also for dignity, rights, secure choices and social memory. The open question on the last page is not a mark of despair: it is the first letter of civic consciousness.

Appendix 1: Close-Reading Notes on All Sixty Chapters

The notes in this appendix follow the sequence of every chapter of the original. These concise chapter notes are not a replacement for the main critical study; they constitute its indexed textual evidence. The page numbers given are the opening pages of chapters as printed in the original copy's contents, not the complete page ranges of each chapter.

Part I: The Search for Employment (Chapters 1–12)

Chapter 1 — The Queue of Applicants

Original edition, p. 2. Navgarh's crowd, the need to keep certificates safe, and the uncertainty of a five-thousand-rupee salary confront Naina's self-respect with economic necessity. Beneath the public proclamation of 'merit', the practice of obscure rules reveals the gulf between institution and ideal. A slip from 'Nayi Disha' becomes the first material indication of future danger.

Chapter 2 — Household Accounts

Original edition, p. 9. Saraswati's household ledger becomes a record of the invisible burden of women's labour. Madhavi's experience of domestic violence and illicit alcohol furnishes a social context for the main employment plot. Domestic needs impel Naina to seek work, but those very needs also leave the family vulnerable to fraud.

Chapter 3 — An Old Acquaintance

Original edition, p. 16. Abhay's journalism and Naina's earlier student activism establish a shared habit of questioning. Savita's difficulties with examinations and indications of construction transport open two future narrative strands. Abhay's distinction lies in refusing to pronounce for or against an institution or contractor without corroboration.

Chapter 4 — Nayi Disha Employment Centre

Original edition, p. 24. The gulf between the inviting language of employment advertisements and actual working conditions becomes apparent. The presence of Kusum, Kiran, Ratan and Virendra makes the office not merely a place that provides jobs but a complicated system of influence and records. Naina's questions give her ethical disposition a practical form.

Chapter 5 — Poonam's Deposit

Original edition, p. 33. Drawing on family savings and loans, Poonam deposits money in the hope of securing a distant appointment. The formal receipt inspires confidence but does not clarify where the appointment is to be. The chapter invites readers to understand her initial hope rather than retrospectively condemn her as foolish in light of later events.

Chapter 6 — Chandan's Debt

Original edition, p. 42. Uncertainty in the examination system and economic pressure draw Chandan towards temporary warehouse work. Within one family, one path leads towards formal office employment and another towards informal goods transport. Household expenditure underlies both, but their degrees of risk differ.

Chapter 7 — The First Day at Work

Original edition, p. 51. Naina carefully preserves a copy of her appointment letter and accepts responsibility for reconciling applications. Her concern with the precise meaning of signatures enters the routine of regular employment. Delayed wages and office disorder raise new questions about the attraction of actual work.

Chapter 8 — Kiran's Warning

Original edition, p. 60. Office procedures, unauthorised files, verbal instructions and client pressure expose Naina to difficult limits on her decisions. Kiran appears not simply as an adversary but as a manager operating within a precarious administration. Naina adopts the rule of never recording conjecture as fact.

Chapter 9 — Ratan's Reputation

Original edition, p. 69. The real benefits received by students from Ratan's financial support are acknowledged. Yet the contrast between his imposing name on the platform and lists of ordinary applicants reveals the limitations of public philanthropy. The narrator does not treat reputation and moral trustworthiness as synonyms.

Chapter 10 — The First Salary

Original edition, p. 78. The pleasure of first earnings is connected to medicine for the mother and the household bills: self-reliance brings both joy and responsibility. The question of returning deposits also arises in the office. An unclear letter concerning Poonam's journey connects Naina's private happiness to collective anxiety.

Chapter 11 — Suspicious Goods

Original edition, p. 88. Chandan encounters an incomplete description of crates and questionable vehicle papers. He withdraws from one shipment, but the question remains how much courage economic pressure will allow him next time. The character is credible in this uncertainty.

Chapter 12 — Poonam's Final Message

Original edition, p. 98. After Poonam's departure, an insecure telephone call seeking help produces the novel's first major crisis. A message of enthusiasm changes into evidence of fear. Naina's decision to inform the family promptly and seek legal assistance provides a practical test of her ethical convictions.

Part II: The Missing People (Chapters 13–24)

Chapter 13 — The Switched-Off Telephone

Original edition, p. 110. An unanswered ringing telephone and a family awake through the night create a collective experience of uncertainty. Ramlal holds documents but does not know his daughter's present whereabouts. Recording the time of messages becomes an initial ethical and administrative act in the search.

Chapter 14 — At the Police Station Door

Original edition, p. 119. Obtaining a complaint number in a government corridor marks a journey between fear and formal rights. Poonam's own reported words are set against the institution's incomplete assurances. The novel insists that a written answer from an office is not necessarily the last word about reality.

Chapter 15 — A Changed Name

Original edition, p. 128. Differing entries for the same training group's name and location turn an employee's work into an elementary means of investigation. Naina's caution lies in assembling facts, not in accusing anyone without sufficient confirmation. Names change, but the family's actual question remains.

Chapter 16 — Documents of Deception

Original edition, p. 138. An unsigned notice and an original register that does not match it expose a crisis in documentary trust. The novel draws a clear distinction between the existence and authenticity of a document. Saraswati's practical advice to 'keep a copy of the papers' reinforces the central motif.

Chapter 17 — Abhay's Report

Original edition, p. 147. Abhay's reporting on unemployment, charges and wages brings a public problem into view, but it does not immediately locate Poonam. The limits of news reporting are acknowledged in this distinction. Editorial responsibility and evidentiary checking are central to the chapter.

Chapter 18 — Dishonour in the Village

Original edition, p. 156. An attack of social shame and rumour upon Poonam's grieving family becomes another form of violence. The family must organise work, cultivation and the search at once. Fear of 'dishonour' emerges as a social mechanism for silencing a victim's voice.

Chapter 19 — Secret Accounts

Original edition, p. 164. Naresh's reconciliation of accounts brings together unpaid wages, rewritten dates and incomplete payments. This is not a dramatic confession of crime but the tension of ordinary clerical honesty. The question 'Who is responsible for decisions about what is entered in an account?' sums up the chapter's institutional ethics.

Chapter 20 — An Illicit Relationship

Original edition, p. 172. Kiran and Ratan's extramarital relationship produces a crisis of trust in two households. Dinesh's financial worries and Vibha's examination of bank records bring institutional connections into private distress. Wrongdoing and insecurity occupy different layers of the characters' circumstances.

Chapter 21 — The First Threat

Original edition, p. 180. Signs of a threat appearing in connection with Abhay's reporting publicly communicate fear. Renewed pressure on staff and victims heightens narrative tension. Poonam's photograph and a safeguarded copy of the complaint in Naina's desk serve different functions as memory and evidence.

Chapter 22 — Naresh's Decision

Original edition, p. 189. Naresh remains determined to record his questions in writing. Responsibilities towards home, his ageing father and his sister reveal the actual tension between danger and duty. He is not a prophetic hero but a person unwilling to turn away from what he knows.

Chapter 23 — Beside the Canal

Original edition, p. 197. The discovery of a body transforms the city's everyday geography into a scene of violence. Direct witnesses, identification by the family and spreading rumour produce the many social voices of grief. Caution about making accusations becomes still more necessary after the death.

Chapter 24 — Murder and Investigation

Original edition, p. 206. Sujata separates place, time and first-hand accounts from what others have merely heard. With this initial procedural discipline, the narrative chooses patient accumulation of evidence over miraculous police work. The murder remains an open question.

Part III: Hatred and Betrayal (Chapters 25–36)

Chapter 25 — The Memorial Gathering

Original edition, p. 216. Grief in Naresh's home is not merely a public address but an interruption of everyday time. The contrast between the ordinary movement of the city and the family's arrested time is vivid. Naina resolves to remember the dead man's 'questions'; grief assumes the form of civic memory.

Chapter 26 — The Burden of Blame

Original edition, p. 224. A notice concerning an internal office inquiry may become a means of restricting access to possible evidence. The gulf between accusation and proof risks perpetrating a further injustice against Naresh's memory. Naina pledges to distinguish what she knows from what she has merely heard.

Chapter 27 — Chandan's Silence

Original edition, p. 232. Keeping his warehouse experience to himself, Chandan remains afraid at home. The eventual breaking of silence is an ethical disclosure within the plot, not immediate forgiveness for earlier misconduct. Trust between brother and sister now depends upon an exact admission of suppressed facts.

Chapter 28 — Vibha's Suspicion

Original edition, p. 240. Vibha raises questions about financial rights exercised in her name and the authenticity of signatures. The comforts of her home do not reassure her; old affection for her husband and a demand for rights coexist. This is a subtle, unsloganised portrayal of female autonomy.

Chapter 29 — Kiran's Admission

Original edition, p. 248. Kiran admits to Dinesh the truth of her relationship and her negligence concerning office documents. Her guilt extends both to personal betrayal and to questions raised by the deceased employee. The decision to live apart opens a harder path of accountability than instantaneous forgiveness.

Chapter 30 — Doubts About Love

Original edition, p. 257. Anxiety within Naina's household and the testing of trust in her relationship with Abhay occur together. The central ethical challenge is to maintain the distinction between private love and verification of public news. Personal difficulties do not cause them to abandon the search undertaken by Poonam's family.

Chapter 31 — A False Accusation

Original edition, p. 265. A fabricated message circulated with Naina's image damages her employment and reputation. Formal suspension from a post and proof of criminal guilt are different things, and the novel represents the difference with unusual clarity. The speed of communication media is not the speed of truth.

Chapter 32 — A Mire of Debt

Original edition, p. 273. The small sum of money remaining to Chandan, creditors' pressure and a lack of lawful work explain the causes of wrong choices without making them justifiable. Rules entered into a notebook mark the beginning of self-reform; the writer repeatedly reminds us that a crisis does not end before those rules can be put into practice.

Chapter 33 — A Night in Hospital

Original edition, p. 282. Saraswati's illness converts family anxiety into a bodily emergency. Attention to medicine, transport and hospital arrangements produces a narrative of concrete care rather than abstract lamentation. The mutual dependence of all three household members becomes visible again.

Chapter 34 — A Helping Hand

Original edition, p. 290. Following the hospital crisis, assistance from neighbours and Abhay appears through necessary everyday tasks. Naina's personal affections surface naturally once more. Love here is not immediate rescue but an ordinary relationship built on trust amid suffering.

Chapter 35 — Changing Testimony

Original edition, p. 299. Differences in dates and times among eyewitness accounts challenge the investigation. The discovery of an envelope bearing Naresh's handwriting in a bundle at Rekha's home makes domestic memory a possible source of evidence. The chapter holds factual inquiry and the character's grief together.

Chapter 36 — Naresh's Documents

Original edition, p. 307. Rekha places the original papers she has preserved before the police. Entries in the notebook open a path towards examining actual financial transactions. Naresh's written labour replaces his absent body as a presence in the story. Yet both the question of his murder and Poonam's whereabouts remain unresolved.

Part IV: The Price of Truth (Chapters 37–48)

Chapter 37 — Renewed Questioning

Original edition, p. 317. When old evidence is placed in a new sequence, questions arise about a vehicle's ownership. Chandan's incomplete recollection must be compared with transport records. The police opt to verify the original register rather than make an immediate accusation.

Chapter 38 — The Old Vehicle

Original edition, p. 326. Registration, repairs and possible routes of a vehicle become material leads in the murder investigation. Proximity to a warehouse does not itself prove a crime, a caution that reveals the investigative integrity of the narrative. Precise distinctions of place and time become essential.

Chapter 39 — Inside the Warehouse

Original edition, p. 334. Registers and transport documents discovered during a search expose the economic form of the criminal network. Coded names in certain lists cannot be connected directly to Poonam's whereabouts. This delay distinguishes the overall structure of crime from the search for one particular victim.

Chapter 40 — Kiran's Fear

Original edition, p. 343. After the warehouse search, Kiran stands between institutional pressure, threats and the prospect of confession. Distinguishing documents she actually signed from orders issued without her consent is the beginning of ethical courage. Moving towards fact despite fear establishes the real cost of her decision.

Chapter 41 — Vibha's Decision

Original edition, p. 351. Acquiring bank records and resolving to live independently create a new form of agency for Vibha. Old affection for Ratan, hurt and economic questions remain together. These subtle contradictions prevent her from becoming a mere instrument of emotional revenge.

Chapter 42 — A Cross-Border Lead

Original edition, p. 359. Different recruitment names and outside payments in workers' registers arouse suspicion of a wider exploitative network. Sujata refuses to provide the family with incomplete information about anyone's present location. Tension between familial hope and inadequate evidence drives the chapter.

Chapter 43 — News of Poonam's Whereabouts

Original edition, p. 368. Information from a labour assistance centre provides concrete indications that Poonam is alive and safe. Verifying her identity before informing the family protects the dignity of their relief. The discovery is a major turning point in the search, not the conclusion of the investigation.

Chapter 44 — Poonam Found Alive

Original edition, p. 376. The discovery of Poonam alive and receiving safe care removes a central dread of the story. Health, contact with family and the timing of future testimony are treated as separate stages. 'Alive' is a word of emotional relief here, not a claim of complete healing or justice.

Chapter 45 — Testimony of the Wound

Original edition, p. 384. Poonam chooses when to make her statement and retains the right to pause. Her experience raises questions of economic exploitation and restrictions on freedom of movement. The police insist on comparing her testimony with other records but attach independent importance to her protection.

Chapter 46 — A Dishonest Offer

Original edition, p. 393. Naina receives an enticing proposal to stop questioning or change her account. She refuses despite the continued uncertainty of her livelihood. Defending truth is here no longer merely admirable advice: it becomes the decision to accept the possibility of personal economic loss.

Chapter 47 — Manoj's Arrest

Original edition, p. 401. Correlation of vehicle registers, payments and warehouse leads brings the inquiry to an arrest. Arresting one accused person does not automatically establish every other alleged offence. The return of the list of remaining questions on the last page highlights the procedural character of investigation.

Chapter 48 — Before the Magistrate

Original edition, p. 410. Kiran classifies her records and, with a lawyer's assistance, prepares to make a judicial statement. Acknowledged signatures, oral orders and threats occupy distinct evidentiary positions. The formal setting of the court raises private fear to a level of public accountability.

Part V: The Survivors (Chapters 49–60)

Chapter 49 — Ratan's Arrest

Original edition, p. 420. On the strength of financial records, the influential Ratan is arrested. Yet people waiting outside the office for their deposited fees to be refunded demonstrate that a photograph of an arrest is not a substitute for judicial and economic restitution. This distinction establishes the ethical register of the fifth part.

Chapter 50 — The Truth About the Murder

Original edition, p. 429. The warehouse, vehicle, call records, medical timeline and conflicting statements related to Naresh's death are examined again. Contrary to what the title might lead one to expect, the chapter does not instantly present a final judicial finding. This restraint is a strong illustration of the novel's commitment to evidence.

Chapter 51 — The Closed Office

Original edition, p. 437. Outside the locked gates of 'Nayi Disha', the old advertisement promising a secure future forms a sharp image of irony. Alongside action against the accused, unpaid wages owed to innocent staff and the applicants' deposits become fresh crises. Stopping injustice and making good its social damage are different undertakings.

Chapter 52 — Vibha's New Life

Original edition, p. 445. At Sumitra's home Vibha arranges her financial papers and looks for a means of beginning again. Her willingness to leave the flowers in her old garden where they are creates a complex relation between memory and autonomy. A 'new life' signifies not denial of the past but the restoration of rights.

Chapter 53 — Dinesh's Admission

Original edition, p. 454. Dinesh separately acknowledges his hurt, financial failure and responsibility for improper threats. Preserving rather than tearing up the wedding photograph subtly suggests a separation of memory from revenge. The author does not declare him innocent, but neither does he close the possibility of self-revision.

Chapter 54 — The Ethics of Reporting

Original edition, p. 463. Abhay forgoes an opportunity to publish Poonam's image; instead he issues a correction and provides useful addresses for labour rights. He chooses factual integrity, privacy and readers' welfare over potential

sensationalism. Journalism here is public responsibility, not the consumption of an event.

Chapter 55 — Chandan's Error

Original edition, p. 472. Rather than flee from debt and the risk of legal inquiry, Chandan prepares to appear when required. Resuming ordinary household tasks is a modest form of social re-entry. His wrongdoing is not thereby cancelled; he has begun the process of acknowledging responsibility.

Chapter 56 — A New Employment Initiative

Original edition, p. 480. Naina's employment assistance centre rests on tangible expenses, rent, computers and the limited labour of colleagues. Its principle —'Only as much information as has been verified'—reverses the earlier institution's extravagant promises. The centre becomes a modest attempt at social reform, not a miraculous answer.

Chapter 57 — Opposition to the Marriage

Original edition, p. 489. Family disagreements concern caste, income, social reputation and a woman's right to continue working after marriage. Naina listens to objections without surrendering her right to decide. Personal choice in love becomes linked to respect for labour and justice across caste divisions.

Chapter 58 — The Court Hearing

Original edition, p. 498. Rekha's sheet, Seema's bread, the child's school fees and judicial documents are all present together. The procedural rights of both defence and prosecution are acknowledged. The assignment of another hearing date does not lift the weight of life from the affected household; the conflict between judicial and domestic time is unmistakable.

Chapter 59 — Another Queue for Employment

Original edition, p. 507. The novel revisits the crowd at the bus station with which it began, but in the light of Naina's experience the queue has acquired a deeper significance. Crises of education, recruitment and daily household expenses continue. The word 'again' joins the persistence of an economic cycle to the difference made by individual learning.

Chapter 60 — Life Goes On

Original edition, p. 515. The marriage of Naina and Abhay and their subsequent household arrangements entail practical discussion of shared domestic labour and care for elders. Fair pay for Poonam's limited part-time work, Kusum's outstanding applications and Naresh's unresolved case keep the story anchored in an unfinished reality. By urging Rupa to read the documents before paying a fee, Naina develops from the applicant of the first chapter into a helper in the public sphere. The final question remains open; the movement of a living society will seek its answer.

Appendix 2: Primary-Text Evidence Supporting the Research Claims

1. The reality of labour and insecure wages: Chapters 1, 2, 6, 7, 10, 32, 51, 56 and 59. Central claim—the actual gulf between formal qualifications and secure income.

2. The necessity and limits of written evidence: Chapters 1, 4, 8, 14–16, 19, 36–39 and 48–50. Central claim—the existence of a document does not itself establish truth; source, signature, date and cross-checking are essential.

3. Women's right to decide: Naina (1, 31, 46, 56, 57, 60), Poonam (44–45, 60), Vibha (28, 41, 52) and Kiran (29, 40, 48). Central claim—the right to make decisions about one's life manifests itself under different social conditions for different characters.

4. The conflict between news reporting and privacy: Chapters 3, 17, 21, 30, 54 and 60. Central claim—an accountable balance between information in the public interest and a victim's dignity.

5. Institutional investigation and incomplete justice: Chapters 14, 24, 35–39, 42–50 and 58–60. Central claim—suspicion, arrest, prosecution and final determination are distinct stages.

6. Domestic labour and care: Chapters 2, 33–34, 58 and 60. Central claim—medicine, food, shelter, household ledgers and care for elders are connected with questions of civic rights.

7. Responsibility following ethical failure: Chandan (11, 27, 32, 55), Kiran (20, 29, 40, 48) and Dinesh (29, 53). Central claim—poverty, trauma or the breakdown of a relationship does not provide automatic absolution.

8. The difference between reputation and actual conduct: Chapters 9, 19–20, 28, 41 and 49–51. Central claim—even where philanthropy produces real benefits, financial conduct requires independent evaluation.

9. Restricted possibilities of social reconstruction: Chapters 52–56 and 60. Central claim—the labour, remuneration, cooperation and professional autonomy required for rehabilitation, without any claim of complete victory.

10. The circular conclusion: Chapters 1, 59 and 60. Central claim—the queue remains, but the capacity to ask questions is acquired.

Appendix 3: Limitations of the Study and Further Research

This research study is based on textual analysis of the available digital copy of the original work. Without independent historical sources, it does not treat the Navgarh, employment organisations or characters mentioned in the narrative as actual persons or documented locations. The publication year has been taken from the publishing information of the copy examined; no independent library collation of editions has been undertaken. External research sources provide

contexts for literary comparison, theory and social analysis, not direct verification of the novel's events.

Four questions would be particularly valuable for future research. First, how has the representation of unemployment and the constraints upon workers changed in contemporary realist Maithili novels? Second, what distance exists in this work between women's subjective voices and third-person institutional narration? Third, how do oral dialogue and administrative language shape one another in Maithili social prose? Fourth, how do the recurring motifs of paper and queues appear in comparative readings of Indian novels? Answering these questions requires direct reading of other original novels; the present study has not presumed to establish comparisons through conjecture.

Appendix 4: Index of Characters, Episodes and Textual References

Major episodes: Chapters 1–5 concern applications, household income and expenditure, and terms of employment; Chapters 12–16 deal with disappearance, the initial police inquiry and altered identities; Chapters 23–24 concern Naresh's death; Chapters 36–42 pursue records, warehouses and the movements of workers; Chapters 44–45 concern Poonam's safety and her right to determine the conditions of testimony; Chapters 48–51 treat judicial presentation, arrests and the closure of an institution; and Chapters 56–60 deal with livelihood, the assistance centre and new social relationships. Across these episodes the private experience of unemployment becomes a problem of public responsibility.

Character constellation: Naina Mishra—the search for employment and information assistance; Poonam Yadav—travel for work, disappearance and autonomous rehabilitation; Abhay Paswan—news, verification and privacy; Saraswati Devi—domestic economy and care; Chandan—examinations, debt and risks at work; Naresh Mandal and Rekha—records, memory and justice; Sujata Kumari—lawful investigation; Vibha, Kiran, Dinesh and Ratan—the contradictions of relationships, reputation and economic domination.

Limits of interpretation: These characters belong to a fictional narrative. Their dialogue cannot be regarded as the author's direct autobiographical statement, their city as automatically identical with a historical locality, or their police inquiry as the record of an actual prosecution. The study distinguishes 'events narrated in the text' from 'meanings inferred by reading the text'.

Basis of textual references: The first seven pages of the available digital copy of the original are preliminary matter. Printed page numbers within the narrative may differ from the automatic pagination of a Word document. Page numbers in Appendix 1 therefore follow the original novel's printed table of contents; elsewhere chapter numbers constitute the principal units of reference.

Bibliography: The Primary Work and Other Theoretical Sources

[P] Primary text: Gajendra Thakur. The City's Other Face [a Maithili novel]. First edition, 2017; © 2017 Gajendra Thakur and Preeti Thakur. Available 6 × 9-inch digital copy examined for the present study, in five parts and sixty chapters. Cited chapter-page locations are taken from that copy.

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PART 06

Nit Naval: Kailash Kumar Mishra

Areṛ: A Village's Folk History

An Extended Literary and Source-Critical Study of a Work by Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra

Abstract

Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra's *Areṛ: A Village's Folk History* (2025) gathers into Maithili prose the place-memory, individual lives, wrestling grounds, markets, religious sites, institutional endeavours, and familial experiences of a village in Mithilā. Through close readings of all seventeen chapters, this study examines the evidentiary difference between folk legend and documented history, the concept of affective geography, the representation of social relations, and the artistry of memoiristic narrative. Episodes concerning Reshma Mausi, Letter Bomb, and the author's mother bring the dignity of ordinary people into the literary foreground; the heroic legends of Bachcha Jha disclose the creative workings of communal imagination. Internal discrepancies in dates, numbers, and medical details, together with an external comparison of the chronology of the Pusa institution, demonstrate the need for source criticism. The work's significance lies not in constituting a definitive and verified history of the village, but in preserving local memory in writing and stimulating future research.

Keywords: Mithilā; Areṛ; folk history; collective memory; affective geography; Maithili prose; source criticism.

1. The Imperative of a Village's Written Self-Knowledge

A village lives as fully in the memory of its people as it appears in its present form. Orchards disappear, ponds are filled in, wrestling grounds close, and families settle elsewhere; yet an earlier village survives in the speech, names, reminiscences, and anecdotes of its inhabitants. It is between this disappearance and persistence that Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra's *Areṛ: A Village's Folk History*

finds its point of departure. Its purpose is not to construct a dynastic chronology but to gather scattered recollections of village life and convert them into a shared written inheritance. The book matters precisely because, alongside portraits of eminent people, it includes episodes that generally escape formal historiography: a confectioner's shop at the market, the affection of a Muslim vegetable-seller addressed as an aunt, the wrestling ground, a mother's courage, the public-mindedness of a wrestler from the boatmen's community, and the life of the village *chaupāṛī*, its communal meeting place.

The authorial statement makes clear that the impetus for this undertaking arose from the writer's experience of living away from his native village. After journeys through many places and centres of learning, the village came to occupy his consciousness more intensely. Project work on rural society, training in folk studies, and the publication of a local account concerning Hitnath Jha led him to a decision: the lives of ordinary people should be written in their own language. By saying 'our village', he declares his standpoint at the outset. Such intimacy is the book's strength, although it also carries the risk of diminishing critical distance.

To regard the volume as a wholly documented 'history of Areṛ' would misconstrue its own stated character. The author himself describes this collection as a first instalment and the beginning of further writing. Its position is therefore somewhere between a preliminary record of an evolving folk history, a gathering of memoiristic prose, and a proposal for subsequent field research. The genuinely critical questions concern how the author handles the differing evidentiary levels of oral tradition, how his prose makes memory visible, and what procedures are needed to resolve contradictions within the text.

2. Distinct Orders of Evidence: Folk Legend, Memoir, and History

Four principal kinds of material coexist in this book. First comes the author's direct experience—his childhood, mother, relatives, education, and scenes he personally witnessed in the village. Second are incidents heard from family members or elders, whose narrators are sometimes named and sometimes not. Third are legends transmitted over generations, such as the superhuman strength of Bachcha Jha or a granary whose rice never ran out. Fourth are assertions about schools, temples, land, a sugar mill, or the independence movement that could in principle be tested against archival records. To treat these disparate materials as a single kind of evidence would be a fundamental methodological error in writing folk history.

The literary truth of a folk legend is not identical with the archival truth of an occurrence. 'Such-and-such a wrestler possessed extraordinary strength' may be a narrative truth expressive of communal admiration. But the assertion that 'a clod hurled by a particular person killed a British official and led to a trial' is a specific, verifiable historical claim. It calls for police registers, judicial papers, colonial records, or independent testimony. This distinction does not diminish the

dignity of folk legend; rather, it clarifies both the meaning of social memory and the historical standing of the event in question.

The Oral History Association's fundamental principles emphasise recorded oral interviews, the relationship between narrator and interviewer, the temporal situatedness of memory, consent, and preservation. Dr Mishra's book consists principally of memories circulating by word of mouth and their retelling in the author's prose. It is properly valued as a collection of narratives; to classify it as a systematically conducted interview archive, however, one would require details of narrators, dates, places, questions and answers, and original sound recordings. The distinction is not an accusation of inadequacy but an indication of directions available to future scholarship.

Article 2 of UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage includes oral traditions, social practices, rituals, knowledge concerning nature, and traditional craftsmanship within the field of cultural heritage. In the light of this international definition, Areṛ's wrestling grounds, markets, ritual practices, and oral recollections may all become objects of heritage research. Their status as cultural heritage, however, does not in itself constitute archival verification of any historical assertion.

3. The Work's Composition: From Village to Person and Back to Village

The main text comprises seventeen chapters. The first three establish a background of geography, naming, economy, and social problems. The accounts of the two Bachcha Jhas, Mahadevasthān, Buddhinath Jha, Rattelal Jha, holy men, the independence movement, and Vishvambhar Jha then embody collective remembrance in particular human figures. The final five chapters turn to the humorous yet poignant recollections of Raghu Babu, the life of the author's mother, Letter Bomb's self-respecting character, his mother's courage, and reflections on communal life. This movement shows that a village is not merely a map or a settlement but a living world of human relationships, actions, and institutions.

The arrangement is not strictly chronological. Conjectures about antiquity, twentieth-century activities, childhood recollections, and religious legends move backwards and forwards through time. This uneven temporal motion has a literary advantage: several historical periods appear within a single arena of memory. For historical readers, however, a separate chronology, the life dates of each person, evidence for occurrences, and a register of sources would be necessary. The text is both a treasury of stories and material for historical inquiry. The distinction between these two functions, not their uncritical conflation, must guide its interpretation.

3.1. 'A General Introduction to the Village of Areṛ': History Emerging from a Living Inventory

The first chapter maps the village as a society. It brings together a possible derivation of its name from the castor-oil plant, a trading route towards Nepal, the Raiyam sugar mill, the transport of sugarcane, markets, schools, sport, wrestling, livestock-raising, and the diversity of caste communities. The confectioners' shops, *chūṛā-dahi*, *jalebī*, and remembered names of traders are especially revealing of a fine-grained rural economy that statistical tables alone cannot recover. The taste of goods, reputation, and mutual acquaintance become dimensions of economic relations.

One of the most affecting passages in this chapter concerns Reshma Mausi. The author's mother accepts a vegetable-seller from the Muslim Kujra community as her own sister and instructs the children to call her *Mausi*—maternal aunt. This small scene must not be reduced to a declaration of communal harmony. Kinship is established here through conduct rather than birth; the exchange of the marketplace enters the sphere of domestic affection; and a woman becomes the independent maker of her own relationships. The passage achieves through concrete scene-making what formal praise could not.

The market as a meeting place: trade, kinship, and women's agency

The opening also raises possibilities concerning Vajrayāna monks, an old route from Magadha to Nepal, direct associations with the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, and Kālidāsa's possible journey along this road. No firm primary sources are cited for these claims. They may properly be discussed as hypotheses, not as established history. The first chapter states that fifteen footballers obtained employment at the mill, but the fourth supplies a different figure.

3.2. 'The History, Geography, and Affective Geography of a Place and Its Village Name': The Plurality of Names

The second chapter forms the work's conceptual spine. The village's name is not merely a geographical identifier here; it carries memory and prestige. The author attends to the transformations between 'Areṛ', the Sanskritising 'Arerū', and the administrative English 'Anarer'. How local people experience a name changed in government records is an important literary and sociological question.

The essential meaning of 'affective geography' here is that administrative demarcation and cultural belonging do not always observe the same boundary. Even after certain families of Purwārī Tol came within the administrative limits of North Pherauñjā, they continued to regard themselves as part of greater Areṛ. Communal feasts, shrines, shared history, and kinship sustain this identification. The coexistence of modern administration and traditional cultural geography offers a promising point of departure for local studies.

Yet establishing the etymology of a place-name requires comparisons of phonological development, older maps, revenue records, and early written attestations. The appearance of similar-sounding forms does not establish their common origin. The author raises questions suitable for research; without supporting evidence, they should not be accepted as conclusive answers.

3.3. 'A Village of Mithilā: Many Problems and a History': Uncomfortable Questions amid Pride

The third chapter inserts an unsettling social history into the village's agreeable memories. Through child marriage, widowhood, women's lack of autonomy, the indigo and sugarcane economy, the rise and decline of the sugar mill, and the Pusa agricultural institution, the author makes plain that the village cannot simply be glorified as 'heritage'. Girls' lives, the division of labour, and the entry of institutional power are important dimensions of its social history.

The chapter's strength is its refusal to conceal patriarchal customs behind village pride. Nevertheless, the sweeping suggestion that child marriage originated with a single external religious-political force cannot become a historical conclusion without adequate evidence. Property, inheritance, scriptural ideas, class, social rules governing marriage, and the organisation of women's labour all require independent investigation.

The chronology assigned to the founding of the Pusa institution does not agree with the institution's official history. The regional questions raised in the passage remain significant, but its dates and causal explanations require reconsideration. A fuller examination is given in a separate section of this study.

3.4. 'Bachcha Jha the First: A Historical Legend Preserved in Oral Tradition': The Wrestler's Heroic Saga

In the account of the first Bachcha Jha, prose assumes the register of heroic legend. The earth of the wrestling arena, traditional descriptions of prodigious bodily strength, a contest against a wrestler from Nepal, praise from the Maharaja of Darbhanga, a confrontation with a British officer at the Saurāṭh marriage-assembly grove, and further tales of inexhaustible prowess together fashion the aura of a communal hero. The narrative ascends through expectation, challenge, victory, and moral esteem. Society gives its collective courage the shape of a symbolic human body.

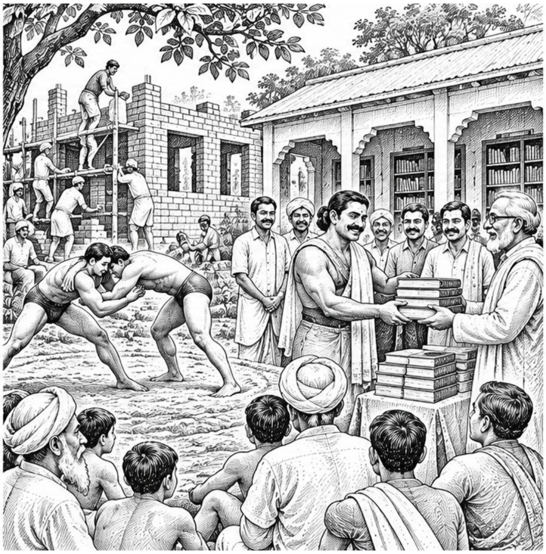
The literary truth of this saga resides in its continuing existence as folklore. If the assertion that a clod struck a British officer, causing his death and subsequent judicial proceedings, is treated as a specific historical occurrence, independent documentation becomes necessary. The book does not present such evidence. Bachcha Jha's image as a courageous folk hero is therefore a proper subject for historical investigation, while judgment on the alleged violent incident must remain suspended.

Heroism here signifies not only physical strength but a resolve to defend local honour. Yet the voices of the hero's critics, adversaries, or contemporary women are not heard. Research into these silences is also necessary if a genuinely plural folk history is to be written.

3.5. 'Bachcha Jha the Second: Areṛ's Human Heritage': From Strength to the Schoolhouse

The portrayal of the second Bachcha Jha differs from the earlier heroic saga. Agriculture, land, family obligations, philanthropy, and the construction of a school predominate. The author estimates his birth at about 1870–75 but supplies no birth record. The account of Bachcha Jha Janata High School, the donation of land, and financial assistance depicts the creation of human capital.

Here the wrestler's social standing extends beyond bodily power to that of a builder of a public institution. If deeds of land donation, school registers, early minutes of the managing committee, and testimonies from donors' descendants were obtained, this portrait could become a substantial chapter in the history of rural education. The demand for evidence does not oppose communal pride; it works towards its preservation on firmer ground.



Wrestling, philanthropy, and the making of a public school

This chapter offers another derivation of 'Areṛ': alongside the castor-oil plant, the name is associated with the villagers' supposedly 'stubborn' temperament. Neither etymology should be treated as decisive. Its account of the year of Vishvambhar Jha's death and the examination position of the student Rajkishore Mishra conflicts with statements elsewhere in the book; these discrepancies are examined below.

3.6. 'The Folk History of Areṛ and Mahadevasthān': Tradition at Work within a Place

The sixth chapter comes close to a methodological statement of the book's own position. The author regards Areṛ simultaneously as his birthplace, an area of research, and a place of learning. The 'insider who knows' and the 'inquirer who investigates' inhabit the same person. This position gives uncommon access to ancestral stories, ritual practices, village relationships, and local speech. Proximity, however, does not exempt the author from scrutinising each tradition. Keeping 'I was told' distinct from 'I saw' is especially important here.

The history of Mahadevasthān is more than an account of the consecration of a divine image. Education, Sanskrit learning, communal labour, faith, donations, and the movement of people are associated with the site. Asking how a religious place develops into an institution takes the inquiry from family memory to collective administration. The author also introduces comparative instances of manuscript preservation in other regions; specified sources for those comparisons would strengthen the argument.

The chapter offers a basic warning about the preservation of memory: while living narrators remain, their accounts can be heard again and checked, but after

their deaths some part may disappear irrevocably. This urgency gives the book's entire undertaking of folk documentation its meaning.

3.7. 'The Eminent Buddhinath Jha and the Celebrated Durgā Shrine of Purwārī Tol': Donation, Legend, and Institutional Memory

The seventh chapter gives two distinct legends about the birth of Buddhinath Jha. Longing for a child, devotion to Baidyanath, misfortune, and blessing lend religious meaning to a man's birth. The coexistence of two versions of the same episode is itself significant: collective memory is not an immutable register but a process of recollection shaped by several narrators. If future researchers record each version together with the narrator's name, residence, age, and date of narration, the transformations of the folk tale may become intelligible.

The story of rice never running out in the 'Lakshminiyā Bakhārī' granary symbolises miraculous abundance. The book offers no grounds for treating it as a directly verified agricultural occurrence. Its literary significance lies in an imagined boundlessness of beneficence, communal expectations, and exceptional generosity. By contrast, the Durgā shrine of Purwārī Tol, its pond, festivals, and ritual administration belong to the village's public history and are comparatively amenable to verification.

The author does not restrict Buddhinath's philanthropy to his own caste. References to resources or grazing grounds for the Amat community raise questions suitable for inquiry into social distribution. But those who benefited should be interviewed independently of the donor family's accounts. The distinction between temple priest and ritual officiant, and the succession of those maintaining the tradition, provide rare fine detail for institutional history.

3.8. 'The Durgā Temple and Pandit Rattelal Jha Vaidik': Manuscript Heritage and the Transformation of Ritual

The eighth chapter describes Pandit Rattelal Jha 'Vaidik': his Sanskrit learning, rites of worship, manuscripts, and inherited tradition. According to the author, he composed several works, and information is available about sixteen surviving manuscripts. If these manuscripts have been preserved, a catalogue could record their subjects, scripts, paper, numbers of folios, ownership, lacunae, and relationships among copies. Rather than merely applying the epithet 'great scholar', a more substantial scholarly undertaking would be the critical editing of the original texts.

The account of changes in worship is especially important. The absence of animal sacrifice from an earlier rite and its appearance in later practice show that traditions associated with a sacred place are not immutable: they change through social decisions and disagreement. Which rite was earlier, which was modified, who took the decision, and how differing communities understood the change are questions from which a substantive sociology of religion could emerge.

The author acknowledges his inability to verify a claim connected with Janakpur's Janaki Temple. This is an admirable instance of awareness of sources: repeating a prestigious anecdote does not authenticate it. Were the same caution extended to every historical claim, the book's reliability would be further strengthened.

3.9. 'Baba Lakshman Das': The Hermitage, Environment, and Ascetic Community

In the ninth chapter, Lakshman Das's hermitage is connected with cultivation, livestock, a pond, trees, shelter, and popular devotion. The ascetic's dwelling is not merely a centre of private discipline; for surrounding villagers, it also becomes a social place in which to rest, receive food, and assemble. The study of religion thereby enters the history of the rural environment and the management of resources. Records of land arrangements, gifts, donations, and contributions of labour could also make it possible to write the institution's economic history.

Stories of sleeping upon fire, practising immersion in water during winter, or possessing extraordinary physical capacities belong to the domain of popular belief. Their cultural significance may be considerable, but without testing they cannot be pronounced scientific truths. Alongside praise for a hermitage that welcomed gatherings of different communities, the access available to women and the limitations imposed by codes of conduct must also be investigated: the existence of a common place does not automatically mean equal rights for everyone.

3.10. 'Sudarshan Mishra versus Sitaram Das versus Ramchandra Das': A Life Story Rewritten through Changing Names

The tenth chapter narrates Sudarshan Mishra's passage from a worldly identity to that of a renunciant. His birth and connection with Areṛ, his association with the ascetic Sitaram Das, the name Ramchandra Das, a life in a monastery in Uttar Pradesh, service to cattle, and his death in 2018 connect a local biography with an extensive spiritual geography. The individual's name changes, yet the village does not relinquish its intimate relationship with his life. The mobile, migratory form of folk biography becomes apparent.

The creative strength of the portrait lies in the sequence of guru–disciple relations, individual choice, and service. Extraordinary stories of supernatural powers or electrical disruptions in distant lands should, however, remain identified as accounts reported by devotees. A historically documented life would require monastery registers, initiation records, independent interviews both locally and elsewhere, and a death notice. Such material would not lessen the value of the biography in the book; it would make its claims more readily examinable.

3.11. 'Ramanand Sahu: An Unusual Freedom Fighter': Memory Beyond Official Lists

The eleventh chapter tells of the struggles of the trader Ramanand Sahu during the Quit India movement of 1942. In the author's family recollections, police mistreatment, an insult inflicted by seizing his moustache, participation in the movement, and his refusal to pursue official certificates or a pension are particularly significant. The ethical centre of this portrait is that the history of India's freedom does not consist solely of lists of people awarded official recognition; many local participants remain outside formal memorialisation.

But the absence of a name from official lists cannot itself establish the truth of an incident; equally, that absence cannot establish that the incident is false. The way beyond this impasse is independent evidence: police records from 1942, district reports, contemporary correspondence, old papers from the shop, and comparative interviews with families of those who participated in the movement. Such work is as necessary to historical justice as is the respectful literary recording of a life.

3.12. 'Vishvambhar Jha, the Jewel of Areṛ and Man of His Age': The Aesthetics of Collective Mourning

The twelfth chapter contains some of the book's most concentrated literary writing. Vishvambhar Jha's leadership is associated with a library, khadi, schools, public reading, and village development. Instead of relying solely on abstract epithets for a figure of social transformation, the author selects scenes of engagement with the library, students' enthusiasm, work connected with khadi, and popular hopes. Thus, when the narrative reaches his death, the reader feels the loss not only of one individual but of a centre of collective possibility.

In the account of illness and surgery around the Chhath festival, the despondency of the library and other institutions, the personification of objects, and the village's shared grief give the prose the cadence of an elegy. Artistically this pathos is effective. Chronology, however, demands historical scrutiny: the fifth chapter gives 1969 as the year of death, whereas this chapter records 10 November 1970. The author's mention of an ulcer and Dr Asha Jha's quoted response referring to the appendix constitute two differing accounts of the medical cause. Without treatment records, they cannot be merged into one.

Giving space to readers' responses is a significant experiment. Readers on social media emerge almost as co-narrators. It remains necessary, however, to establish whether each comment represents an opinion, additional evidence, or a correction.

3.13. 'Yatra Jīva Tatra Jāh: The Story of Raghu Babu': Compassion within Humour

The thirteenth chapter joins together the losses, struggles, and comic episodes in the life of Raghunandan Mishra, known as 'Raghu Babu'. On one side lies

familial grief; on the other, the remarkable vernacular intelligence that generates satire from ordinary happenings. The coexistence of these contrary emotional registers is its artistic distinction. The linguistic reversals of a journey away from the village and an episode involving ascetics catching fish have the effortless movement of spoken dialogue. The title's religiously inflected irony makes the reader laugh, but beneath the laughter lies a sharp recognition of self-interest and hypocrisy.

The dialogue in these stories is reconstructed from memory, not a verified verbatim transcript. That limitation should be acknowledged in evaluating their literary value. These pages demonstrate that folk history comprises not only the great deeds of 'eminent men' but also the linguistic inventiveness, sorrow, and pleasure of ordinary people.

3.14. 'Such Was My Mother': A Social History of Domestic Labour

In the fourteenth chapter, the remembrance of Shivdulari Devi moves village history away from the renown of patrilineal descent towards women's labour, capacities, and practical intelligence. Childhood restrictions, marriage, the family's economic difficulties, spinning thread, helping at childbirth, and caring for women in the neighbourhood disclose work without which village life could not continue, yet which rarely appears in official documents. The author accords his mother heroic stature, but the basis of that heroism is endurance in daily life and service to others.

The source of this chapter is the author's intimate family experience; its emotional credibility and the possibilities of historical verification are therefore different from those attaching to the generations-old legends of the first Bachcha Jha. Acknowledging the limits of a child's loving perspective does not diminish the importance of writing down the memory of women's domestic labour. Accounts of herbs and traditional remedies should be read as descriptions of past practices, not as medically verified advice for the present.

3.15. 'Letter Bomb': The Social Dignity of a Wrestler from the Boatmen's Community

In the fifteenth chapter, the character of Letter Mukhiya, known as 'Letter Bomb', embodies the book's larger social purpose. Wrestling, courage, service to others, work associated with ponds, affection for relatives, and closeness to the author's family distinguish a hero whose significance derives not from prestigious credentials but from dignity forged in social conduct. He belongs to the Mallah community, yet the author grants him an independent personality that emerges outside inherited narratives of high and low status.

His treatment of a person suffering from leprosy, assistance to people in need, and an affectionate account of naming a son provide vivid instances of personal intimacy. Yet one person's social esteem is no evidence that caste inequality was absent throughout the village. Future accounts should include the voices of

Mallah labourers, women, and the landless. The ash remedy reportedly used in an episode of snakebite is material from folk narrative, not reliable instructions for medical treatment.

3.16. 'My Mother's Indomitable Courage': Decisive Action in a Crisis

The sixteenth chapter raises the maternal portrait in Chapter Fourteen to a new narrative intensity. An attack by stinging insects upon women and children in the Senhā area, the spread of fear, and Shivdulari Devi's immediate decisions create dramatic tension. The mother is not merely an embodiment of compassion: she becomes an active heroine who takes risks in a crisis, seeks immediate remedies, and decides to send the afflicted to hospital.

This is an occurrence directly witnessed or closely experienced in the author's life. Its experiential basis is consequently different from that of an ancient folk legend; nevertheless, dialogue recalled many years later should not be mistaken for a verbatim record. From a literary perspective, the escalation of the crisis, the heroine's intervention, and the movement towards relief are highly effective.

3.17. 'Village Society: Defining the Village's Identity and Character—A Democracy of Everyone's Contributions': Ideal and Reality

In the final chapter, the *chaupāṛī*, shared assemblies, mutual conversation, neighbourhood relations, caste diversity, and the contributions of every community give rise to the idea of a 'democracy of the village'. If the book begins with a succession of particular heroes, it ends by attempting to recognise society itself as a collective protagonist. 'Everyone's contribution' is not merely a slogan here: it asks who is entitled to write history, whose labour is counted, and whose names are omitted.

Yet the ideal of concord cannot be accepted as historical proof of equality. In proportion to the extensive accounts of major benefactors, scholars, ascetics, and educated men, the independent voices of Dalit workers, Muslim women, agricultural labourers, widows, and landless people are fewer. The author does not make these groups entirely invisible; nevertheless, an argument for social 'democracy' would require evidence of their actual participation in landholding, resource use, schools, religious sites, and public decision-making. An account of the contribution of a Chamar woman associated with the family of Ayachi Mishra is meaningful, but the absence of her own name or autonomous voice exposes an inequality in the historical record.

The mere existence of a *chaupāṛī* does not demonstrate an equal-rights public sphere. Who could sit there, who could speak, whether women had access, and whose interests prevailed in settling disputes are questions that would provide a research basis for the assertion of 'everyone's contribution'. The title invites difficult investigation; it is not itself a completed historical conclusion.

4. The Narrative Voice of 'Our Village': The Strength and Limits of Belonging

The author's greatest stylistic achievement is his intimate narrative persona. He does not speak as an anonymous historian from outside, but as someone who recognises his ancestors, relations, ponds, schools, religious sites, and market from within his memories of the village. The child, adult, field researcher, and collector of oral recollections coexist within this 'I'. Episodes involving his mother or Reshma Mausi linger because the objects in the scenes, modes of speech, forms of address, and emotional reactions are concrete.

Conversely, the wish to defend the village's reputation sometimes leads the author to expansive claims. The tendency to establish the village's antiquity from Kālidāsa's hypothetical journey, to present an exaggerated wrestler legend as uncontested history, or to express a person's importance through accumulating superlatives all have intelligible social motivations. The author seeks to challenge negative representations imposed from outside. At the level of history, however, stronger evidence rather than longer panegyrics would be the most effective response.

The author's governing principle is a mixture of 'something of the village and something of my own'. Within memoiristic prose, such a combination has its legitimate place. What is indispensable editorially is clarity of genre: where the source is personal experience, let it be presented as such; where it is oral report, identify the narrator; where it is an archive, specify the document. Intimacy and research need not then become antagonists.

5. Geography, Emotion, and Administrative Boundaries

One of the book's important propositions is that the extent of a village cannot be defined solely by a revenue map. The two northern and southern panchayats of Areṛ, its fourteen *tols* or neighbourhood hamlets, and affective inclusion within 'greater Areṛ' despite the boundaries of Pheraunjā show residents continually reconstituting their sense of place. Alongside the list of neighbourhoods, the author recalls family invitations, cultural movement, and shared shrines.

The distinctive argument is not that every administrative division is wrong. Rather, 'state boundary', 'local pronunciation', 'ritual territory', and 'kinship network' are four maps that never fully coincide. The variant names Areṛ/Arerū/Anarer are the linguistic expression of that disjunction, while ties with North Pheraunjā express its social dimension. 'Affective geography' accordingly has the potential to become a productive concept in local research.

Nevertheless, contemporary records are required to verify the present administrative definition of the fourteen neighbourhoods, panchayat boundaries, and the dates when institutions were established. Comparing revenue maps, census village directories, older panchayat documents, and locally

drawn maps would clarify the relationship between emotionally experienced and officially documented boundaries.

6. Cultivation, Markets, Sugarcane, and Labour in the Rural Economy

The book's economic history is finely observed, although it contains relatively little systematic statistical evidence. Castor-oil plants, rice, vegetables, betel leaves, tobacco, sugarcane, livestock, the Raiyam sugar mill, means of transport, the market, confectioners' shops, khadi, and women spinning thread together form a many-sided picture of village production. A benefactor who establishes a school, a Sahu prosperous through trade, cultivating families, sellers of milk and curd, and women who work within the home occupy different positions within these economic relations.

The history of sugarcane is not merely the history of a crop. The mill office, weighing, transport, employment, industrial organisation, and the mill's decline reveal a larger chain of rural production when considered together. The book offers elements of this history but provides no annual production figures, wage series, landownership records, accounts of farmers' debts, or definitive date when the mill closed. Farmers' receipts, appointment records from the mill, transport documents, and older market accounts could turn these descriptions into an evidentially grounded economic history.

Women's domestic labour should not disappear into the moral language of 'service to the family'. Shivdulari Devi's spinning and assistance at childbirth helped reproduce the social conditions of village life. Reshma Mausi's regular journeys to market likewise record the history of women's work, mobility, and enterprise. Once the economic value of these contributions is brought into view, the picture of village prosperity becomes more inclusive.

7. Education, Libraries, and the Long Life of Institutions

Religious and educational institutions appear intertwined throughout the book. Sanskrit learning near Mahadevasthān, collective festivals at the Purwārī Durgā shrine, Bachcha Jha Janata School, Vishvambhar Jha's library, work associated with khadi, and the achievements of students are all sites in the formation of cultural capital. An institution's success cannot be attributed to a single charismatic figure alone: land, buildings, books, teachers, pupils, donations, and sustained collective effort are integral to it.

The story of the second Bachcha Jha's donation of land raises a question: where are the school's founding register and deeds of ownership? Vishvambhar Jha's library raises another: what access did readers have across caste and gender lines? Rattelal Jha's manuscripts raise a third: what is the physical condition of the surviving texts? Together these inquiries could form the basis of a comprehensive institutional history. The book as it stands emphasises the achievements of individuals; further research should also include the experiences of workers, teachers, students, librarians, and women users who kept these institutions functioning.

The force of the account of Vishvambhar Jha's death comes from the author's refusal to reduce public work to a catalogue of personal virtues: several institutions emerge as extensions of the man's life. In this way, the book transforms its idea of heroism—from the champion of wrestling to the builder of a public world.

8. The Multiple Social Functions of Religious Sites

Accounts of Mahadevasthān, the Durgā temple, Lakshman Das's hermitage, and ascetic monasteries are written from a position of devotion; but it would be a mistake to regard these places merely as houses of worship. Ponds, trees, cattle, festivals, hospitality, ritual administration, the succession of priests, and the public use of donations all embody a history of communal resources alongside religion. The central question in the temple's history is how the generosity attributed to Buddhinath Jha acquired lasting institutional form.

Recording changes in ritual practice is a particular achievement of the book. The difference between Rattelal Jha's original rites and later practices concerning animal sacrifice demonstrates that even a tradition described as 'ancient' is modified by social decisions, debate, and reconstruction. Comparing the original manuscript, amended versions, and any surviving records of collective decisions could make Areṛ a significant site for studying changes in religious practice.

Folk tales of an ascetic's extraordinary powers or the miracle of inexhaustible grain certainly have their literary place. Classifying them separately from archival history is no denigration of faith: studying the social need to tell such stories actually illuminates the cultural meanings of devotion.

9. Caste, Community, and Unequal Visibility

In his authorial statement, the writer mentions the village's many castes and communities: Brahmins, Kayasthas, Bhumihars, Yadavs, Mallahs, Doms, Musahars, Dhanuks, Kurmis, Koeris, Telis, Muslim occupational groups, blacksmiths, washermen, and numerous others. By enumerating them he attempts to recognise the village not as the private preserve of a single lineage, but as a shared terrain of many people's labour.

Yet to appear on a list and to occupy the narrative centre on equal terms are not the same. Compared with the detailed lives of pandits, donors, prominent men, and ascetics, the experiences of agricultural workers, Musahar families, the Dom community, Muslim women, and the landless, told through their own interviews, receive much less space. This is not a denial of the writer's generous intention but an indispensable literary-historical observation. The recollections of Reshma Mausi, Letter Bomb, and the Chamar woman broaden the field of vision without completing the work of inclusion.

Before there can be a 'democracy of everyone's contributions', there must be a democracy of the right to speak and to be recorded in collective memory. A

future volume ought to reserve space for non-dominant communities to speak in their own language, for women's labour, wage arrangements, rights to use ponds, the caste organisation of communal meals, and the history of access to schools. Personal goodwill and structural inequality can coexist in the same society. A mature historiography must be able to acknowledge this contradiction.

10. Rereading the Mother, Women, and Popular Memory

'Such Was My Mother' and 'My Mother's Indomitable Courage' should not be confined to the status of sentimental additions at the book's end. Together they create an informal history of women. The first encompasses the extended duration of thrift, livelihood, support at childbirth, and endurance; the second concentrates decisive action into an intense moment of sudden danger. Through these two different temporal scales of women's work and courage, the mother moves beyond an idealised image to emerge as a social agent.

The portrayal is grounded in a child's love, and praise may consequently at times be one-sided. Yet the written recollection of domestic labour by women is itself an uncommon cultural resource. If later work broadens the writer's perspective to the lives of widows, women cultivators, Dalit women, women of minority communities, and teachers, the gendered account of village history will become more just.

From this standpoint, Reshma Mausi's episode invites another reading. To treat her solely as a symbol of religious harmony obscures the real labour and mobility of a woman trader. The appellation *Mausi* is the tender expression of a relationship in which the formal boundaries of religion and commerce open onto domestic intimacy.

11. The Craft of the Prose: Scene, Dialogue, Hyperbole, and Mourning

The work's prose is not uniform. In the introductory chapters, lists, places, and occupations accumulate densely; the Bachcha Jha chapters have the exuberance of heroic folklore; Buddhinath's episodes repeat the rhythms of legend; Raghu Babu's writing produces humorous incongruity; Vishvambhar Jha's portrait imagines collective mourning; the chapters on the mother possess the warmth of memoir; and the concluding chapter takes on the expository movement of social reflection. This variety distinguishes the volume from an ordinary collection of biographies.

Dialogue draws the reader into the scene. Language creates kinship in the address to Reshma Mausi, becomes humour in Raghu Babu's episodes, and gives momentum to heroic wrestling stories through challenge and reply. If dialogue attributed to the distant past has not been obtained from a direct written source, no claim to verbatim accuracy should be made. The literary success of conversation must be evaluated separately from the certainty of its factual content.

Hyperbole creates communal pride in the accounts of Bachcha Jha and the Lakshminiyā granary; personification in the account of Vishvambhar Jha's death gives institutions and the individual a shared tragic life; Raghu Babu's satire interrogates religious pretension. But repeated words such as 'great', 'divine', and 'man of the age' can displace the specificity of the scene. When the writer offers a concrete image—the mother's courage, the aunt's arrival, the library's desolation—the reader apprehends the importance of a person without the need for panegyric.

12. Factual Inconsistencies within the Original Text: Specific Questions for Verification

Respect for the original book does not require silence about its factual discrepancies. Different years, figures, and diagnoses within a single volume affect its historical credibility. The following points are not merely a 'list of errors': they are precise questions requiring examination in a revised edition. No one version has been declared definitive without independent corroboration.

12.1. The Number of Footballers Employed by the Sugar Mill

The first chapter reports that fifteen young footballers from Areṛ found employment at the Raiyam sugar mill; the fourth presents the related account with a figure of thirteen. These may conceivably refer to different occasions, but the book offers no such explanation. Appointment registers from the mill, sports association papers, or independent lists from the families of those appointed should be used to establish the number.

12.2. Rajkishore Mishra's Position in the Matriculation Examination

The first chapter describes Rajkishore Mishra as having stood tenth in the Bihar-wide matriculation examination, whereas the fifth records ninth place. The year of examination and the original board results must be checked. Respect for a student's talent does not depend solely upon rank, but accuracy provides a proper basis for the public memory of achievement.

12.3. The Year of Vishvambhar Jha's Death

The fifth chapter places the death around the Chhath festival of 1969 CE; the twelfth gives 10 November 1970 CE. This is a serious chronological discrepancy. Confirmation may be possible from a death certificate, old hospital records, family diary, school memorial-meeting register, or contemporary report. Checking the date of the local Chhath festival against the civil calendar must also form part of the investigation.

12.4. Different Accounts of Vishvambhar Jha's Medical Condition

The author's main narrative describes surgery for a gastric ulcer; in a response quoted from Dr Asha Jha in Chapter Twelve, the appendix is mentioned instead. These are two different narrators' accounts, not a single medical conclusion.

Which detail is accurate can be determined only from treatment records or reliable contemporary corroboration. For the present, the distinction between the sources should be preserved.

12.5. Competing Explanations of the Name Areṛ

The prevalence of castor-oil plants is one popular explanation of the name; the fifth chapter proposes another, deriving it from the temperament of the villagers. Both are interesting folk etymologies. A decisive study would need to assemble evidence from historical phonology, early revenue maps, regional pronunciations, and the available written forms of the old name.

12.6. Unverified Claims about Antiquity, Travel, and Judicial Events

The original text cites no independent documentary evidence for Kālidāsa's journey along this route, the early movements of particular Buddhist communities, direct associations between the locality and great religious epics, or a colonial trial following Bachcha Jha's violent confrontation. Conjecture and popular belief must be independently examined before they are regarded as historical events. An absence of records does not automatically establish 'falsehood', but neither does it provide proof that an assertion is 'established'.

13. Comparison with External Institutional History: Pusa

The third chapter raises questions about the history of the agricultural institution at Pusa and the removal of institutional resources from Mithilā. These questions retain their regional significance. To verify the chronology, the official history of the Pusa, Bihar Regional Station of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute was consulted. According to that account, a government land transfer took place on 26 December 1903; the foundation stone of the agricultural research institute was laid on 1 April 1904 by the then Viceroy, Lord Curzon; and work in five divisions commenced in 1905. The institute's names were changed in 1911 and 1919. The earthquake of 15 January 1934 damaged the original buildings; the institute was transferred to Delhi on 29 July 1936; and the new buildings in Delhi were inaugurated on 7 November 1936. A botanical substation remained at Pusa; it was redesignated a Regional Research Station in 1969 and upgraded in 1975. (Official 'Introduction', ICAR–Indian Agricultural Research Institute, Pusa, Bihar Regional Station.)

The founding year and the details concerning a British official given in the book do not agree with this official sequence. Factual amendment of the relevant passage in the original is therefore called for. Yet an error of chronology does not invalidate the author's underlying questions about Pusa's role in the agricultural history of Mithilā and local access to modern research. An accurate chronology makes the questions more productive: what administrative considerations governed the decision to relocate to Delhi after the 1934 earthquake? What resources were made available to the station remaining in Bihar? What alternatives exist for extending modern agricultural research throughout the

region? Answers demand policy archives and the institute's annual reports, not conjecture alone.

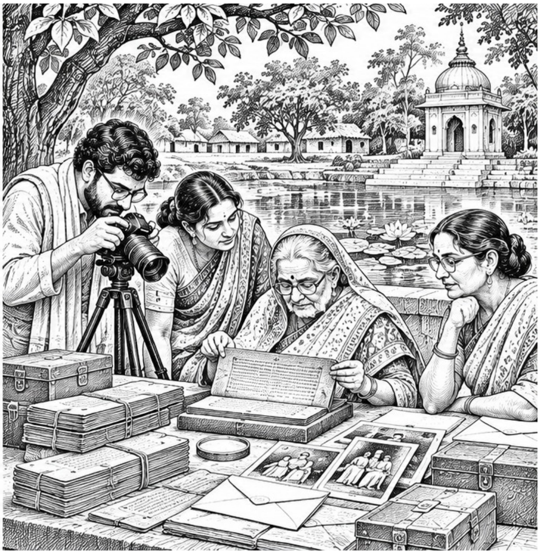
This external examination is one limited, documented example. The present review makes no claim to have externally verified every individual, donation, judicial case, examination result, foundation of a temple, or episode from the independence struggle mentioned in the village account. Where institutional evidence has been found, it is identified explicitly; elsewhere, the book's assertions have been read as assertions made by the book.

14. Manuscripts, Photographs, and a Cultural Archive

The reference to Pandit Rattelal Jha's manuscripts connects the work to a potentially tangible heritage. Fragile paper, older scripts, dispersed family collections, and incomplete copies urgently require local preservation. Each available manuscript should be documented through digital images, dimensions, folio count, opening and closing lines, script, physical condition, approximate date, the owner's permission, and the location of a secure copy. Trained textual editors could then compare the various witnesses. It cannot be stated with certainty that every manuscript mentioned in the book still survives; a preliminary inventory is therefore essential.

Old photographs of the temple, ponds, wrestling grounds and orchards, sugar-mill offices, schools, khadi centres, and communal meeting places may serve as independent evidence. Each image should record its date, the person who provided it, evidence identifying the people depicted, and permission for publication. Photographs should be treated not as mere ornament but as historical materials from which questions can be asked.

The author's appeal that other villagers write down their memories is the seed of a community archive. A school or library could house a collection of folk history where old letters, invitations, shop ledgers, field receipts, donation records, registers of public decisions, and recorded interviews would gradually be preserved. The owner's consent must be a condition of preserving and publishing private materials.



A community archive: manuscripts, photographs, and remembered places

15. A Practical Method for Future Research

The first task is to prepare a register of narrators. For each occurrence, record the narrator's name, age, residential *tol*, relationship to the author or subject, date and place of interview, language, whether the statement is based on direct experience or hearsay, and permission for publication. The same story should be heard from people of different generations, communities, and genders. Variant accounts should not be dismissed as 'wrong'; each should be preserved in its own form. Making audio recordings available alongside edited text would permit subsequent scholars to re-examine the material.

The second task is to construct a year-by-year chronology of institutions. Events concerning school foundations, teachers' appointments, the opening of the library, activities at the sugar mill, excavation of ponds, initiation of temple worship, bank branches, police stations, and the delimitation of panchayats should be ordered alongside the surviving papers. Each entry should be explicitly classified as 'written record', 'one direct witness', 'several independent witnesses', 'oral tradition', or 'authorial conjecture'. These labels distinguish forms of evidence, not the dignity of the human beings involved.

The third task is a community-centred survey. Women, Mallahs, Doms, Musahars, Kujras, blacksmiths, washermen, agricultural labourers, landless people, artisans, and other groups should become co-authors of their own histories. Alongside 'Whose labour built the village?' the inquiry should ask 'Who had the right to speak in public decisions?' Narratives of harmony can conceal actual exclusion; accounts concerned only with conflict can make

genuine fellow-feeling invisible. Independent testimony should test both possibilities.

The fourth task is to make a composite map of place. The old and new neighbourhoods, relationships with Pherauñjā, ponds, orchards, wrestling grounds, schools, temples, hermitages, markets, and former sugarcane transport routes should be compared across revenue maps and popular recollection. Stories associated with every site should be set beside their temporal contexts and traced through different generations. In this way, the book's concept of 'affective geography' could develop into a concrete method of research.

The fifth task is rigorous textual editing for a revised printing. Dates, figures, spellings of names, narrators' identities, factual references, the order of paragraphs, and details of illustrations should all be checked. The flavour of the spoken idiom should remain, while accidental orthographic instability and uncertainty of attribution are removed. Unnecessarily converting the original Maithili into an artificial, heavily Sanskritised register would be undesirable: the book's vitality lies in the ease of its vernacular language.

16. Maithili Language, Style, and the Possibilities of Editorial Refinement

The decision to write in Maithili is central to the book's linguistic significance. Recording stories collected orally in the language of the people respects their social environment. Regional forms of address, everyday actions, domestic relationships, conversational irony, and vernacular vocabulary prevent the characters from becoming merely documentary silhouettes. *Mausi*, the idiom of wrestling grounds, the language of hermitages, and the words of village kinship are markers of distinct social worlds.

Three distinctions are necessary in a carefully edited edition. First, spellings of place-names should be consistent: where the variants Areṛ, Arerū, and Anarer themselves constitute an object of inquiry, all forms must be retained, but accidental shifts elsewhere should be eliminated. Second, the natural speech of the dialogue should be preserved, while punctuation, syntax, and paragraph divisions in the expository prose are clarified. Third, when external academic terminology is indispensable, its Maithili meaning should be supplied at first occurrence; both general readers and scholars would benefit.

Alongside 'history', the accurate use of terms such as 'legend', 'memoir', 'folk belief', 'personal experience', 'oral evidence', and 'field record' would make a future edition more rigorous. Where the author directly witnessed something, it should be identified as experience; an ancestral story as oral tradition; an explanation of the village name as folk etymology; and an event corroborated by surviving papers as document-supported. Such verbal distinctions are not merely matters of style: they constitute an ethical discipline of knowledge.

17. Integrated Assessment: The Wider Significance of Local Memory

The original contribution of *Areṛ: A Village's Folk History* lies not in historical omniscience but in the social courage to write history. The author places people, sites, and memories excluded from formal historical accounts at the centre of public reading. Here the village emerges not simply through official statistics but through personal forms of address, the construction of schools, the wrestler's body, the taste of the market, the mother's labour, and collective mourning. This diversity makes the work an important object of study in the local memoiristic prose of Mithilā.

Artistically, the most successful passages are those in which ordinary experience is rendered concretely: Reshma Mausi's arrival, Raghu Babu's humour, Shivdulari Devi's courage, Letter Bomb's service, and the life of institutions plunged into grief at Vishvambhar Jha's death. In these passages, the author's sensitivity honours the characters instead of submerging them beneath a crowd of epithets. The legends of the first Bachcha Jha and Buddhinath possess a different literary importance: they are expressions of society's self-imagining and must not be converted into historical verdicts without stringent examination of the evidence.

The work's limitations are equally worthy of attention. Conflicting historical dates and figures, insufficient references for particular claims, an uncertain boundary between miracle and verified occurrence, fewer independent voices of women and marginalised communities than of prominent men, and confident conjectures about place-names and ancient journeys all raise serious critical questions. Yet these limits do not negate the book's fundamental achievement. Their explicit recognition can instead become the foundation of future local research.

The book's enduring question extends far beyond 'How famous was Areṛ?' It asks: 'Whose lives went into the making of Areṛ, and what memories of those lives will survive for the next generation?' When the author's personal attachment to his native village takes the form of this public question, the book transcends its local bounds. To call it not the definitive history of the village but an important beginning in writing local history is to accord it the critical respect it deserves.

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‘Bookmania’: Text, Society, and Critical Discernment

A Critical Study of Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra’s Collection of Maithili Reviews

Abstract

Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra’s ‘Bookmania’ is a collection of twelve critical essays concerned with Maithili poetry, novels, and cultural prose. The present study examines the critic’s movement between the social import of literary works and their formal organisation. Women’s experience, caste discipline, family relationships, migration, historical consciousness, and archival representation emerge as the book’s principal concerns. The collection’s achievements lie in its social sensitivity and the breadth of its dialogue with readers; its limitations can be seen, on numerous occasions, in extended plot summaries, the uneven application of theoretical criteria, and inadequate classification of sources for historical claims. The conclusion of this inquiry is that the dialogue initiated by ‘Bookmania’ can become more productive when literary commitment is joined to evidentiary rigour and close attention to form.

Keywords: Maithili criticism; book reviewing; feminist discourse; narrative; caste; pañjī; social history

1. Introduction: The Real Question Posed by a Collection of Reviews

To regard ‘Bookmania’ as no more than an introduction to, or appreciation of, twelve books would be to diminish its actual composition. Readings of poetry, examinations of novelistic plots, biographical sketches, social concerns, human rights, cultural questions, readers’ responses, and critical problems of pañjī history intersect throughout this volume. The author’s interest in relating literary content to society is unmistakable. In literature he seeks the heat of lived experience, class inequality, women’s position, caste restrictions, migration, displacement, and the continuity of folk culture. In this respect, the book also becomes a document of the concerns of contemporary Mithilā. Yet a document and a coherent work of literary criticism are not identical. Their successful conjunction, and the tensions between these two modes, constitute the central question in evaluating this volume.

The reviews must be read on two levels. The first requires us to observe how Kailash Kumar Mishra understands the works of his chosen poets and novelists. The second asks how dependable his own critical language, treatment of evidence, conclusions, and engagement with readers prove to be. Without the second question, criticism would remain a mere restatement of the reviewer’s opinions. This examination therefore assesses the collection’s social sensitivity separately from its evidentiary shortcomings. Where the written text supplies

direct support, the judgment is firm; where only indications within the work are available, the judgment remains qualified.

The title 'Bookmania' carries the spontaneous eagerness of a love of books. Yet it conceals a productive dilemma for criticism: does loving a book require assent to everything it says? Does literary loyalty mean taking the author's side, or having the courage to ask difficult questions on the basis of argument, text, and doubt? 'Bookmania' is at its best where its author interrogates inequalities manufactured by society; it is at its weakest where enthusiasm obscures critical distance.

2. Bibliographical Description and the Book's Organisation

According to the printed publication details, the book is entitled 'Bookmania', bears the subtitle 'A Collection of Maithili Reviews', and is written by Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra. It was published by Navārambh; the first edition appeared in 2025, priced at 250 taka. The publication details give ISBN 978-93-48495-59-4. The contents comprise three parts and twelve principal pieces. This explicit organisation immediately makes clear that the first area of inquiry is poetry, the second the novel, and the third prose of other kinds.

Part One, 'Poetry Collections', includes 'Ghasal Aṭhanni' and Madhup's Universality: An Anthropological Examination; Munni Madhu's 'Phullokā'; Vinod Kumar Jha's 'Sabāk Kusum Kāminī'; and Munni Madhu's 'Kakarā Ke Dūst'. Part Two, 'Novels', includes Chaturanan Mishra's 'Kalā'; Hetukar Jha's 'Kakarā Le Arajab He'; Ushakiran Khan's 'Bhāmatī'; Kedarnath Chaudhary's 'Karār'; Ushakiran Khan's 'Hasīnā Manzil'; and Ravindra Narayan Mishra's 'Ṭheṭh Parak Maulāel Gāchh'. Part Three, 'Miscellaneous', contains an examination of Vishwanath Jha's 'Sundarī: Nihuri Phūkū Āgi' and an extended account of the cultural contribution of Gajendra Thakur's 'Dūṣaṇ Pañjī'.

One feature of this arrangement is immediately apparent: the second part is relatively substantial, but the final piece in the third part is also extensive. The volume's weight thus rests not only on distinctions of genre but also on some of the author's particular sociocultural concerns. Several reviews are followed by comments from different individuals under the heading 'Readers' Responses'. Their presence offers indications of the book's history of reception and circulation; nevertheless, readers' responses, the critic's own interpretation, and independent critical evidence must be kept clearly distinct.

3. 'The Author's Note': The Significance of the Critic's Self-Positioning

The book's 'Author's Note' is a principal key to understanding the collection's method. Mishra connects his journey as a reader and writer of Maithili with his educational and professional life. He makes clear that his original scholarly interests included anthropology, human rights, folklore studies, and social questions. For this reason, a literary work is not merely a matter of linguistic beauty for him; it also offers an occasion to investigate popular practice and social structures. He discusses literary contacts, encouragement, and relationships with readers among the sources of his motivation to write criticism. This self-

disclosure gives readers an unusually clear opportunity to understand the critic's position.

The advantage of this background is that characters in novels cease to be mere literary ornaments: an urge arises to discern behind them marriage arrangements, caste, everyday social life, religion, geographical mobility, and economic relations. When reading poetry, too, he gives greater weight to social conduct than to emotional effusion. Yet this point of entry has its limits. Anthropological questions cannot substitute for every artistic question posed by a poem or novel. The sequence of narration, point of view, verbal texture, silence, metaphor, contradictions within a character, and plurality of meanings—all may suffer if reduced to a single social message.

Consequently, an evaluation of this volume must both recognise the author's social commitments and examine the independence of literary form. The 'Author's Note' offers a credible point of departure for the reviews, but by itself does not establish the method's validity in every respect. The discussion that follows asks how much distance separates the author's stated interests from the analyses actually accomplished in individual essays.

4. The First Essay on Poetry: 'Ghasal Aṭhanni' and Madhup's Universality

The first essay calls itself an 'anthropological examination' in its very title. This establishes its direction of reading: Madhup's poetry is approached as an articulation of social injury, human sympathy, equality, women's experience, and folk life. Drawing on passages from a range of poems, the essay discusses violence, exploitation, dignity, poverty, social inequality, and human relationships. Particularly fruitful in literary terms is the attempt to connect the image of the 'worn half-rupee' in 'Ghasal Aṭhanni' with social experiences of use and devaluation. A worn coin raises the question of exchange value; relating it to the social standing of a human being is one possible means of disclosing the meaning of neglect.

The reviewer reads the poems as forms of ethical sensibility in which the suffering of the dispossessed and a critique of power relations become visible. He dwells particularly on women's bodies, labour, and standing. At this level the essay deserves appreciation, since it refuses to confine poetry to metre, ornament, and sentimentality. It asks to whom social conduct grants dignity and whom it turns into an instrument. This question brings the poetry's orientation towards the common people into view.

Yet 'universality' is a very large critical claim. The presence of social suffering in a poem does not by itself prove that its experience will be the same everywhere without historical and linguistic mediation. Such a claim requires specific analysis of the arrangement of images, modes of address, local vocabulary, and possibilities of transformation. The essay is rich in quotations, but in many places the necessary pause for examining a poem's artistic logic after quoting it is

too brief. A poem's subject and its achievement complement each other; they are not synonymous.

The 'Readers' Responses' appended to this essay demonstrate the enthusiasm of readers for the reviewer's writing. They should not, however, be treated as independent criticism or evidence for the original poetry collection. Greater objectivity would be achieved by presenting appreciative comments as records of the literary public sphere, rather than using their statements to support analytical conclusions. Even so, the first essay establishes the collection's intellectual direction: a persistent desire to connect literary beauty with questions of social justice.

5. 'Phullokā': Women's Voices, New Media, and the Language of Resistance

In his discussion of Munni Madhu's 'Phullokā', the reviewer accords particular importance to the poet's public presence, the circulation of her writing on social media, women's experience, and poetry's assault on male-dominated behaviour. The essay establishes a dynamic relationship between the circumstances of composition and the poetry's subject matter. Maithili poetry is no longer confined to the printed book: digital reading, audiences, debate, and immediate response are transforming its reception. The opening discussion recognises this change.

At the thematic level, the critic raises questions of women's selfhood, bodily autonomy, resistance to violence, and social hypocrisy. His attention to direct address, satire, questioning, and refusal in the poems is commendable. Reading such poetry requires more than simply invoking 'women's suffering': one must examine whom the poet addresses, how language overturns relations of power, and how individual experience becomes collective resistance. The essay opens several avenues in this direction.

Women's voices and the public forum of Maithili poetry

Nevertheless, the danger of equating social courage with literary success persists here as well. Rigorous criticism would ask how original the linguistic construction of anger is, how the voice changes from one poem to another, and what relationship obtains between direct statement and suggestive expression. The reviewer quotes numerous passages, but a separate and systematic study of the collection's poetic sequence, sound-patterning, and generation of indirect meanings remains necessary.

For the critic, poetry becomes an instrument of social awakening; this is an important concern. Yet poems sometimes leave questions unanswered, keep contradictions open, and make readers uncomfortable. The essay offers relatively little room to recognise such literary indeterminacy as an achievement. Nevertheless, its treatment of 'Phullokā' is significant evidence within 'Bookmania' of feminist discourse and the changing media of literary reception.

6. 'Sabāk Kusum Kāminī': Political Dissent and Close Reading of Poetic Lines

The essay on Vinod Kumar Jha's 'Sabāk Kusum Kāminī' is among those in the volume that repeatedly supply examples from the poems together with their page numbers. The critic examines the poetic world in terms of literature's social responsibility, neglected communities, inequalities in public life, and cultural plurality. Through various passages he seeks to demonstrate connections between the people, geography, history, labour, religion, and discussions of power. His recognition of the poetry's concern with public ethics and human equality is a notable achievement.

A strength of this essay is the sustained presence of the original poetic text. In certain passages the reviewer connects his conclusions to specific poems and page references in the original collection. Readers can therefore trace the textual basis of his interpretation if they wish. Such a practice can prevent poetry criticism from becoming no more than a declaration of taste.

Yet the number of examples and the depth of interpretation are not identical. After many quotations, the conclusions revert to general affirmations of sociocultural goodwill. Individual poems may adopt different subjects, rhythms, metaphors, or satirical procedures; a fuller comparison of these differences would have clarified the collection's aesthetic distinctiveness. Particularly necessary here is a verifiable distance between the inclusive politics suggested by the word 'sabāk' ('everyone's') and the poetry's demonstrable artistic achievements.

A larger question emerges from the essay: is a moral declaration of social inclusion sufficient in itself, or does poetry transform that declaration through a distinctive imaginative world and complex linguistic relations? Kailash Kumar Mishra is confident in addressing the first question; the second leaves considerable scope for closer reading. The limitation here is not an absence of social concern but the relatively restricted attention paid to the layers of artistic construction.

7. 'Kakarā Ke Dūst': Resistance, Social Structures, and the Openness of Poetic Meaning

The essay on Munni Madhu's second collection, 'Kakarā Ke Dūst', resembles the earlier treatment of 'Phullokā' while presenting a reading of sharper social resistance. Through the poems, the reviewer discusses rules imposed on women, violence, humiliation, power within the family, religious or cultural pretexts, and unequal opportunities in modern public life. A significant strength is that he reads a woman not merely as an object of pity but as a voice capable of questioning and refusing.

The reviewer repeatedly returns to the claim that forms of address, the syntax of rejection, and direct questions give the poems their energy of dissent. These considerations are accompanied by questions about social double standards and literature's ethical responsibility. Such reading challenges the tendency to assume that Mithilā's domestic customs are inherently innocent. The question of how power is distributed within tradition gives the essay its relevance.

The limitations are likewise comparable to those of the discussion of 'Phullokā'. It is not enough to commend the intensity of poetic declaration solely as courage. Attention to linguistic tension, repeated images, ironic turns, possibilities of reception, and internal contradictions could have yielded a genuine map of poetic development across Munni Madhu's two collections. The book contains separate essays on 'Phullokā' and 'Kakarā Ke Dūst', but the absence of a comparative conclusion on their mutual relationship is a palpable

omission. An opportunity is thus lost to construct a comprehensive account of women's writing from within the reviewer's own selection.

8. 'Kalā': Historical Re-Reading of a Novel and the Harshness of the Social Order

The essay on Chaturanan Mishra's 'Kalā' opens the volume's discussions of novels. Kailash Kumar Mishra identifies child marriage, familial and social pressure, women's futures, economic circumstances, and changing human relations as central issues in the work. Through the protagonist Kalā and other characters, including Mahesh Babu, he directs attention to society's written and unwritten rules. In his reading, the novel becomes a means of seeing human suffering and the limitations of a traditional social order.

The essay's particular significance lies in its historical consciousness. By discussing the publication history of the original work, the reviewer poses the question of how an older novel may be reread when times have changed. He also mentions its different editions. These references yield a partial history of the book, although the collection offers no systematic independent bibliographical verification of the edition details. For research purposes, the distinction between 'information supplied by the reviewer' and 'historically corroborated fact' remains indispensable.

The extensive retelling of the novel helps readers understand the circumstances, choices, and social situations of its characters. But retelling and literary analysis are not present in equal measure. The discussion would have acquired greater density if it had included sustained subsections on whose viewpoint governs the telling, how narrative time is organised, what language is available to the protagonist's inner life, and whether the resolution of the conflict accords with the possibilities established at the outset.

The reviewer imaginatively projects a possible continuation of the novel with intellectual and ethical enthusiasm. This is an engaging form of readerly participation, but a clear boundary must separate the original novel from the critic's imagined extension. The 'Readers' Responses' that follow consist largely of congratulatory remarks. They may be regarded as evidence of literary reception, not as independent confirmation of the review's judgments. The discussion of 'Kalā' displays the importance and shortcomings of 'Bookmania' together: the problems of social history are treated seriously, but a more exacting close analysis of art remains possible.

9. 'Kakarā Le Arajab He': Family, Modernity, and Intergenerational Tension

The essay on Hetukar Jha's 'Kakarā Le Arajab He' is comparatively brief but dense in substance. Through Shrikant, Jaya, and their familial relationships, the reviewer examines education, the engineering profession, the distance between city and village, marriage, joint-family life, and clashes with caste-based social convention. As he interprets the narrative situation, he repeatedly asks whether

modern education itself liberates people socially, or whether old dispositions return in new forms.

In discussing Jaya and Shrikant's relationship, the possibility arises of seeing a woman's position not only as a domestic role but as a question of decision-making and participation. Marriage is no longer a merely private matter between two individuals: it is implicated in the invisible pressures of family, caste, class, employment, prestige, and culture. The reviewer points out these multiple levels, a strength of the essay.

The concluding portion gives particular prominence to social responsibility, earning a livelihood, and the ethical dilemmas of modern individuals. Its strength lies in treating the novel not merely as a love story or account of married life but as a space for reflection on the social order. Nevertheless, questions about the characters' internal contradictions and the construction of the narrative are less frequent. Whether Shrikant's ideas constitute social oratory or artistic irony within the novel could only be determined by distinguishing a character's speech from the narrator's voice. Without this distinction, there is a danger of taking what is said within the novel as a direct expression of the novelist's views.

10. 'Bhāmatī': Love, Knowledge, and the Problem of Invisible Women's Labour

The discussion of Ushakiran Khan's 'Bhāmatī', entitled 'An Unforgettable Love Story', is one of the volume's engaging woman-centred studies. It brings together the traditional narrative world of Vachaspati Mishra and Bhāmatī, the pursuit of knowledge, affection, devotion, recognition long deferred, and women's experience. The review offers an occasion to examine the relationship between historical memory and imaginative reconstruction in the novel. Its insistence on treating Bhāmatī as a person rather than a mere supplement to a celebrated scholar's life is especially significant.

The serious question here is which forms of labour sustain the public glory of knowledge, and how much of that labour remains invisible in history. The critic assigns a high value to Bhāmatī's love, patience, and contribution. The ethical appeal of such a reading is readily understood. Yet praise of devotion must also examine its social cost. If a woman's life is made into nothing more than a celebration of sacrifice, criticism may inadvertently reaffirm a patriarchal ideal. To ask about Bhāmatī's independent wishes, her right to knowledge, unexpressed aspirations, and the meaning of her silence is not to reject sympathetic appreciation but to deepen it.

In several places the review describes the story's effect and the development of its characters. It would have been stronger still with sustained close reading of the narrator's perspective, the distinction between historical narrative and the modern novel, and the metaphorical organisation of knowledge and love. The study of 'Bhāmatī' deepens 'Bookmania's' concern with respect for women; yet

respect and autonomy are not the same, and this distinction needs to be sustained through to the final judgment.

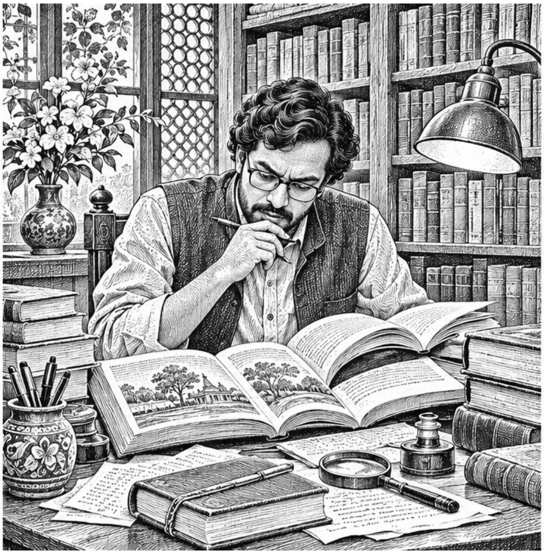
II. 'Karār': Narrative Expansiveness, Political History, and the Risks of Contextualisation

The essay on Kedarnath Chaudhary's 'Karār' is among the collection's most extensive discussions of a novel. The reviewer presents its many narrative levels, episodes involving Rajashekhar and Angila, sociopolitical disorder, power, violence, geography, movement, and the details of changing times. Places in Mithilā such as Darbhanga and Sitamarhi, other Indian regions, and locations beyond India appear as extensions of the novel's fictional world. The critic's principal interest is to discern the plurality of lived worlds within the story.

The essay's strength lies in the extent of its attention. It attempts to discover relationships among the novel's major and minor characters, events, and places. In numerous episodes, discussions of social position and geography provide a basis for observations about the story's sense of time. Some passages also seek to demonstrate the argument through quotation from the original text. Readers consequently gain a preliminary map of the novel's social range.

But the sheer expansiveness of the narrative is also the critic's chief challenge. Where a large number of events are retold in sequence, criticism's central questions may recede into the background. A planned examination of the novel's opening, reversals, climactic moments, the differing modes of speech of its characters, and the significance of its ending should be established apart from plot summary. Rather than treating fictional episodes based on history, or resembling historical events, as direct historical fact, it is methodologically safer to read them as imaginative transformations within the novel.

In his conclusion, the reviewer regards 'Karār' as a fictional world rich in contextual detail. This judgment reflects thoughtful interest, but it requires clearer boundaries between empirically identifiable geography, historical allusion, and the novel's internal truth. The essay reveals the work's breadth to its readers, while also inviting them to ask questions about narrative craft that could make their study more mature.



Reading the book closely: the critic, the text, and the evidence

12. 'Hasīnā Manzil': Partition, Memory, and Humanity

The essay on Ushakiran Khan's 'Hasīnā Manzil' interweaves historical Partition, communal separation, love, family memory, and human suffering. The reviewer attaches importance to the novel's social background and indicates how political transformations in the Indian subcontinent affect the most intimate relationships of private life. The experiences of Hasina, Usman, and other characters form a narrative of home, relationships, trust, and insecurity.

It would be a mistake to read a 'Muslim character' in this novel as merely a representative of a community. Understanding the particular dilemmas, memories, and complexity of an individual character is an independent task of literature. Kailash Kumar Mishra reads the dignity of relationships from a humanistic standpoint; his ethical opposition to divisive politics is therefore unmistakable. This is noteworthy from the perspective of literature's affective purposes.

Nevertheless, interpreting historical contexts requires a strict distinction among different periods, geopolitical events, and the novel's imaginative construction. The reviewer's opening discussion mentions Partition and the background relating to Bangladesh, but a separate analysis of how memory and the chronology of events are composed within the novel would have been more useful. Otherwise, its literary complexities risk being reduced to a moral lesson about history.

This essay discloses the collection's concern to seek human relationships beyond communal identities. Yet both ethical humanism and literary plurality deserve

respect: declarations of compassion and goodwill do not dissolve all the tensions of a character's experience.

13. 'Ṭheṭh Parak Maulāel Gāchh': Migration, Roots, and Familial Distance

The essay on Ravindra Narayan Mishra's 'Ṭheṭh Parak Maulāel Gāchh' addresses a distinctive experience of changing Maithil life: leaving the village to settle in another country, concern for ageing parents, familial uncertainty, fascination with social prestige, and the testing of relationships under sudden crisis. The reviewer mentions overseas migration, episodes connected with the United States, travel through Delhi, and the obstacles of the pandemic. The glittering dream of modern migration is thus confronted with loneliness within the home.

The essay matters for the ethical questions it raises about family. Money, employment, and success may count as individual achievements, but they cannot guarantee the physical presence of relatives when they are needed. Elder members of the family, memories of home, and insecurity in times of calamity bring this distinction into sharper relief. The reviewer attempts to understand the conflict and does not regard the novel as a simple romance of expatriate life.

The metaphor of the 'withered tree' could have received closer scrutiny. Roots, native soil, alien surroundings, growth, and withering could form an intricate chain of meanings. The essay provides ample narrative detail, but insufficiently explores how the title's metaphor relates to the characters' lives, how images of nature and the body function, or how leaps in time and the sequence of memories create the story. Consequently, the emotional force of the work becomes clear while its novelistic construction remains partly unarticulated.

The reviewer's conclusion establishes the novel's importance, after which readers' responses add further praise. Even if one accepts his implicit conclusion, it remains necessary to ask whether the migrant character's choices are products of social structure or simply moral errors. Attending to such distinctions would make the review fairer to the novel.

14. 'Sundarī: Nihuri Phūkū Āgi': Biography, Literary Practice, and the Limits of Criticism

The essay on Vishwanath Jha's 'Sundarī: Nihuri Phūkū Āgi' marks a generic turn in the volume. Here the reviewer discusses the author's range of knowledge, nature, the environment, Mithilā's social organisation, personal experience, authorial disposition, and prose style. Greater emphasis falls on biography and cultural contribution alongside textual reading. The result is a hybrid form, between a book review and an examination of a literary personality.

The reviewer's regard for Vishwanath Jha's diverse interests is evident. He does not restrict the writer's intellectual world to a single genre; instead, he seeks to reveal its breadth through history, folk life, environment, and varied aspects of society. This approach has value, for literary prose draws its energy from many subjects.

Yet an elementary critical distinction is again needed. An author's encyclopaedic knowledge is not synonymous with the artistic achievement of a published work. A biographical account may establish breadth of interest, but assessing the particular form of a story or prose work requires separate scrutiny of style, plot, linguistic situation, recurring imagery, rhythm, and structural coherence. In the closing portion, the reviewer considers the prospect of reaching readers in other languages; this indicates an interest in the circulation of the work, but the usefulness of translation cannot replace a critical reading.

The essay's distinctive contribution is its presentation of an alternative model of the intellectual personality in modern Maithili literature. Its limitation lies in the tendency for personal appreciation sometimes to overshadow comparative examination of the prose's content and craft. Acknowledging this limit does not diminish the essay's importance; it clarifies its generic character.

15. 'Dūṣaṇ Pañjī': Caste, Archives, and the Contested Traditions of Knowledge

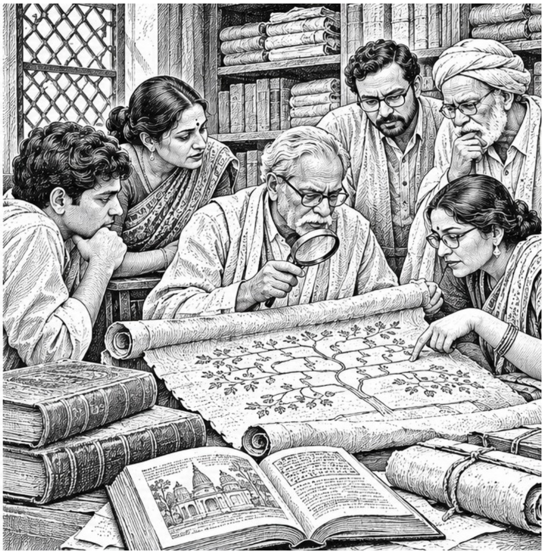
The final essay, on Gajendra Thakur's 'Dūṣaṇ Pañjī', is intellectually the most distinctive and ambitious contribution to the collection. Its subject is not simply poetic language or novelistic narrative, but the pañjī system, genealogical record-making, the right to marry, caste boundaries, social legitimacy, and Mithilā's historical memory. The reviewer places the work within discussions of Maithili culture and considers the need to widen the narrow terms of conventional analyses of pañjī records.

From the outset, the essay crosses the boundary between literary reviewing and social research. The writer poses a sequence of foundational questions: what does it mean for a pañjī to be a document; whose names and information are recorded in it; how are gotra details used; and what is the nature of the sources of knowledge regarding marriage rules? This sequence makes the critic's research orientation apparent. In a society where archives serve as a basis of entitlement, the questions of what they select and exclude acquire ethical and cultural importance.

The author's historical discussion includes details concerning the periods of various historical figures, the pañjī system, and social classification. Such details should be read as the historical understanding presented within the book; without independent archival examination, not every date, genealogy, or decision can be presumed externally verified. The essay makes several leaps between early historical settings and present-day social interpretation. Identifying the type of source at each such point—original document, oral recollection, later commentary, or modern compilation—would increase the evidentiary value of the argument.

The essay offers a systematic enumeration of names associated with numerous castes and communities. This brings the question of inclusion to the fore: should social history be the history of a selected elite or that of a society comprising

many groups? In this sense, the discussion of 'Dūṣaṇ Pañjī' opens the possibility of cultural democratisation. Yet the appearance of names in a list does not establish that the communities concerned have been able to speak for themselves. Control over collecting sources, the power to classify, and self-description by represented communities are three separate questions. An inclusive social history requires attention to communities' own narratives, oral memories, and mutually contradictory records.



Archival inquiry: genealogies, inherited records, and the right to be represented

The extended concluding discussion moves further into procedures for writing pañjīs, genealogies, entitlements, bibliographies, and possibilities of new archival documentation. In the last pages, the writer emphasises critical reconsideration of the social order, written documents, language and script, and tradition. It is thus clear that, for this reviewer, the pañjī is not an inert remnant of the past but an institution affecting present-day social practices. This idea could provide a foundation for wider reflection.

Nevertheless, this essay has the most complex generic character of all. Assessing its historical arguments requires a clearly identified list of primary archives, textual variants, documentary support for dates, and consideration of contrary interpretations. Evaluating its social proposals requires separate examination of their human benefits and practical difficulties. Establishing its literary achievements requires an independent account of the style, structure, and documentary form of 'Dūṣaṇ Pañjī'. Placing all three forms of evidence on the same plane may make an appreciative conclusion seem persuasive, while leaving it uneven when tested by scholarly standards.

Despite these limitations, the final essay greatly enlarges the intellectual range of 'Bookmania'. Standing at the border of literature, it asks questions about social records, cultural entitlements, and historical justice. Much of the collection's distinctiveness arises precisely at this threshold: its wish to transform literary reviewing into broader social criticism, even if its method is not equally mature throughout.

16. Shared Threads Across the Twelve Works

The first common thread is literature's social responsibility. From 'Ghasal Aṭhanni' to 'Dūṣaṇ Pañjī', the reviewer looks within written works for people who suffer under social rules or resist them. The second is women's experience: the female body, standing, labour, relationships, and choices recur in different forms in Munni Madhu's poetry, 'Kalā', 'Kakarā Le Arajab He', and 'Bhāmatī'. The third is the conflict between tradition and modernity: how individuals change amid education, employment, migration, caste, and family expectations. The fourth is cultural memory: remembrance of Mithilā's language, villages, genealogy, folk life, and history connects the essays.

These common threads do not, however, constitute a fully developed critical theory. A theory would have to clarify how social meaning is produced within a text, how its formal organisation shapes that meaning, and whether a contrary reading position is possible. The essays certainly contain the seeds of such questions, but offer relatively few unified theoretical propositions. It would therefore be fairer to describe 'Bookmania' as an active critical undertaking than as a complete methodological paradigm for contemporary Maithili criticism.

The volume makes no claim to encompass the whole history of Maithili literature from the fourteenth century to the present; it is a selection of reviews of modern books. Its selectivity should not therefore be mistaken for historical representativeness. Its criticism of poetry is based principally on a small group of poets, while its choice of novels inclines towards particular social issues. Rather than call this inclination a fault, one should understand it as the critic's declared interest, while also identifying the genres and intellectual positions left unexamined.

17. Women's Resistance and the Glorification of Sacrifice: An Internal Tension

There is a productive but unresolved tension in the volume's thinking about women. When writing on Munni Madhu's poetry, the critic praises women's resistance, autonomous desire, and courage in challenging social rules. In the discussion of 'Bhāmatī', the high ethical value of sacrifice, patience, and devotion comes to the fore. In 'Kalā' and 'Kakarā Le Arajab He', family, marriage, and social expectation appear in complex forms. Read together, these essays require us to ask how extraordinary devotion and independent personhood can be judged by the same criterion.

The answer is not to deny the value of individual self-sacrifice. The problem arises when sacrifice is treated as a woman's natural duty and elevated into a universally binding ideal. A love narrative may risk sanctifying the very inequality challenged by a poem of resistance. Criticism must give this risk a name. The separate essays in 'Bookmania' provide ample material for the debate, but the volume offers no explicit comparative discussion of it. Pointing out this absence is not to devalue its feminist concerns but to demand greater coherence from them.

When assessing a female character or woman poet, one should distinguish the social message, individual desire, narrator's perspective, and reader's ethical judgment. Once these four levels become conflated, the critic may project a preferred ideal onto the experiences of a fictional character. 'Bookmania' offers both an illustration of this risk and indications of how it might be overcome.

18. Caste, Pañjī, and the Critical Meaning of Cultural Representation

The final piece places caste discourse at the centre, although questions of caste inequality occur in different ways elsewhere in the collection. Poor families, social norms governing marriage and conjugal life, literary representation, and the neglect of ordinary people all remain inadequately understood without analysis of social structure. The importance of 'Dūṣaṇ Pañjī' in this context is that it questions the archival dimension of a cultural tradition instead of accepting that tradition as an unblemished source of pride.

Three limitations must be recognised in studying documents such as pañjīs. First, what has been recorded is not the entirety of social experience. Second, what has not been recorded is not necessarily absent from history. Third, a compilation's inclusive intention does not automatically validate every historical detail it contains. Reading the essay in the light of these criteria would create a healthy dialogue between social justice and historiography.

Lalit Kumar's research on the modern history of Maithili language and print suggests that the relations among script, printing, caste, and social representation are far from simple; their history involves questions of contestation and exclusion. This external scholarship provides wider context for the questions raised in the final essay of 'Bookmania', but it does not verify any particular genealogy or date recorded in 'Dūṣaṇ Pañjī'. Acknowledging this limit is itself an indispensable condition of evidence-based criticism.

19. The Distance Between Plot Summary and Narratological Study

In his six essays on novels, Kailash Kumar Mishra introduces readers to the fictional world through extensive accounts of characters' actions, dialogue, and situations. This method has an obvious advantage: readers unfamiliar with a book can grasp the direction of its subject matter. But as criticism becomes an extended introduction, questions of literary craft risk disappearing. Alongside 'what does the story say?', it is equally necessary to ask 'who speaks?', 'who knows

what?', 'what has been withheld?', 'how does time change?', and 'how does language establish the reader's trust?'.

The narrative procedures are different in each case: the presentation of characters' choices and social pressure in 'Kalā' and 'Kakarā Le Arajab He'; the layers of memory, history, and invention in 'Bhāmatī'; the multi-sited plot of 'Karār'; the private memory of political events in 'Hasīnā Manzil'; and migration and temporal distance in 'Ṭheṭh Parak Maulāel Gāchh'. Applying one ethical criterion to all of them causes their aesthetic differences to disappear.

The technique required to separate a work's utterances from the critic's conclusions is simple but essential: first identify the original work's narrative situation; then the character's utterance; next the critic's interpretation; and finally an evidence-supported judgment. Observance of this sequence raises a literary review above the level of essayistic enthusiasm and makes it useful for research. Elements of this discipline occur in many essays in 'Bookmania', but it has not become a consistent method.

20. Meaning, Resonance, and Creative Pauses in the Reading of Poetry

The principal achievement of the section on poetry is its alertness to contemporary social concerns. But the social content of a poem does not exhaust its literary meaning. Diction, pauses, rhythm, repetition, address, irony, local idiom, and suggestion together create a multiplicity of meanings. The essays on the social image in 'Ghasal Aṭhanni', the resistant mode of address in Munni Madhu's poems, and the public language of 'Sabāk Kusum Kāminī' could have engaged more explicitly with these questions.

Quoting a line or two of poetry can be useful, but quotation alone does not establish a work's aesthetics. What comes before a line; what image precedes it; how its last word affects the succeeding line; and whether a contradiction created by the poem is resolved or left open—such questions deepen criticism. The use of quotations in 'Bookmania' attests to serious reading interests; a methodological advance would require fuller linguistic analysis of those very quotations.

Identifying this limit does not mean decorating criticism with a handful of traditional terms such as rasa, dhvani, or alaṅkāra. Theoretical terminology can become hollow without close examination of the actual words. To make the inner organisation of a work visible and then draw conclusions from it: this is the essence of close reading.

21. 'Readers' Responses': The Literary Public Sphere, Not a Court of Final Appeal

'Bookmania' reproduces collections of readers' responses after several of its essays. Such comments follow the discussions of 'Ghasal Aṭhanni', 'Phullokā', 'Kakarā Ke Dūst', 'Kalā', 'Bhāmatī', 'Hasīnā Manzil', 'Ṭheṭh Parak Maulāel Gāchh', and 'Sundarī'. Their presence reveals a lively environment of circulation and reception for literary criticism.

Collected responses can be useful material for literary history: who read the reviews, what language they used, which issues attracted agreement, and how structures of communal prestige operated. Yet most of these responses employ the idiom of congratulation and goodwill. To regard informal comments as 'independent conclusive evidence' would be a logical error. The fact that readers liked an essay does not necessarily establish either the artistic achievement of the original work or the truth of the review's conclusions.

A more useful presentation would have placed these comments in a separate appendix, identifying their source medium, dates, contexts of endorsement, and examples of critical disagreement. In their present arrangement, the responses periodically interrupt the flow of the original reviews. They should not, however, be dismissed as worthless: they offer an unusual glimpse of the communal processes by which Maithili literature is received. A clear separation of genres would enhance their value.

22. Assessing Evidence, Quotations, and Historical Claims

The credibility of reviewing rests not on the vehemence of its judgments but on whether its textual evidence can be checked. Some essays in 'Bookmania', particularly those on 'Sabāk Kusum Kāminī', 'Karār', and 'Dūṣaṇ Pañjī', attempt to connect readers with source texts. Nevertheless, the collection lacks a consistent bibliography, systematic publication information for primary works, a uniform method of quotation, and explicit classification of sources supporting historical claims. Readers may consequently find it difficult to verify many of its interesting conclusions independently.

For example, both the edition history of 'Kalā' and the chronology of traditional records in 'Dūṣaṇ Pañjī' matter, but they require different kinds of evidence. Editions must be checked through title pages, edition statements, and comparisons of printed copies. The history of genealogies or pañjī traditions requires examination of original records, dating, relationships among copies, verification of personal names, and alternative historical accounts. The review collection does not provide an independent investigation of all such evidence; its claims should therefore be identified, in scholarly good faith, as 'statements made by the author'.

The same rule applies to literary quotation. Quoted poetry needs the title and source work; an event narrated in a novel needs a reliable textual reference; and a reviewer's conjecture should be explicitly identified as such. Maintaining these distinctions makes literary analysis more durable. 'Bookmania' moves part of the way in this direction, but more extensive editorial scrutiny could have strengthened the study's authority.

23. Maithili Prose, Critical Vocabulary, and Editorial Questions

A distinctive linguistic feature of 'Bookmania' is its closeness to living Maithili usage. Instead of cultivating academic distance, the author's prose converses with readers. Forms such as 'ham', 'hamrā', 'ī', 'o', and 'ehi' lend warmth and

immediacy to the reviews. This style is especially vigorous in essays on social issues. It is a significant quality for the development of criticism rooted in spoken Maithili.

Yet intimacy requires restraint in sentence construction. In some essays, long sequences of description, repeated conclusions, recurrent phrases of praise, and commentary idioms borrowed from Hindi and English weaken the sharpness of the argument. Refining the language does not mean prohibiting Maithili's natural multilingual character; it means clarifying the sense of technical terms, ensuring coherent relations of cause and consequence within sentences, and preventing conclusions from exceeding their evidence.

An appropriate editorial revision might have questioned every use of expansive terms such as 'universality', 'sociality', 'culturality', and 'anthropological': what specific textual feature is being named here? A term becomes valuable when it identifies something rather than conceals it. The book's critical language has considerable potential; greater consistency in its explanatory discipline would broaden the scope of debate.

The 'Readers' Responses' preserve the different speakers' dialects, spellings, and mixed linguistic forms. Retaining these forms in the original may be appropriate for documentary purposes, but the policy governing the editing of the main critical prose should be distinguished from the policy governing the original spelling of reproduced documents. Such editorial clarity helps readers recognise the different voices within the book.

24. The Book's Place in the Wider History of Maithili Literature

In assessing 'Bookmania', one cannot make it representative of the entirety of Maithili literature. It is a collection of reviews of selected books, intended to identify sociocultural questions in the writings of several authors. From this perspective, its relation to bibliographies and institutional catalogues of Maithili literary history is contextual. The Sahitya Akademi's catalogue of Maithili publications includes entries for Jayakant Mishra's 'Maithilī Sāhityak Itihās' and Devkant Jha's 'Ādhunik Maithilī Sāhityak Itihās'. These attest to an established tradition of historiography in Maithili criticism; no conclusion from these books has, however, been directly imposed on 'Bookmania'.

The same Sahitya Akademi catalogue includes collections on subjects such as 'Maithilī Dalit Lokgāthā O Saṃskṛti', suggesting a broader institutional context for scholarship on literature, folk traditions, and social representation. In this context, 'Bookmania's' concern with caste, pañjī records, and marginalised voices opens a possible site of dialogue; however, such general contextual references cannot verify the specific historical assertions made in its last chapter.

One useful conclusion is that Kailash Kumar Mishra's criticism explicitly favours sociological readings of literature. Its critical position would have been sharper had the book engaged more broadly with other possibilities in Maithili criticism—formalism, reader-response analysis, examination of linguistic craft, gender

criticism, Dalit and Bahujan self-representation, and documentary history. Yet these omissions do not warrant denying the merits of its social outlook.

25. Integrated Assessment: Weighing Achievements and Limitations

The collection's first notable achievement is the author's sustained and serious interest in reading. The volume testifies to the patience required to write about the extensive worlds of poetry and the novel. Its second achievement is social sensitivity: the author seeks to connect literature to the experiences of the dispossessed. Its third is the creation of an active conversation about criticism in Maithili. His practice of collecting responses may not produce critical evidence, but it reveals the workings of a literary public sphere. The fourth achievement is the range of social subjects treated: gender, love, migration, history, language, pañjī records, and cultural representation.

The principal limitation is the uneven proportion between description of works and critical interpretation. Several discussions of novels incline towards plot retelling; in the poetry essays, declarative social conclusions sometimes displace close scrutiny of image and language; and in historical discussions, independent corroboration of facts is often insufficiently separated from the reviewer's exposition. Placing appreciative readers' responses immediately after the reviews also risks compromising the distance required for impartial criticism. To make these limitations explicit is not to devalue the critic's labour but to assess it more fairly.

Nevertheless, the book remains important. The invisible labour in 'Bhāmatī', the social milieu of 'Kalā', the conflict between family and modernity in 'Kakarā Le Arajab He', the divisive history in 'Hasīnā Manzil', the migrant life in 'Ṭheṭh Parak Maulāel Gāchh', and the politics of archives in 'Dūṣaṇ Pañjī' all pose an active question to readers: does literature merely interpret the shape of society, or does it make visible the inequalities within it? 'Bookmania' returns continually to this question.

26. Conclusion: From the Love of Books to Evidence-Based Criticism

The prevailing tone of 'Bookmania' is intimate, socially engaged, and dialogic. Through this tone the collection can connect literary value with the difficult experiences of everyday life. Yet the true dignity of criticism lies not simply in agreement and praise. It lies in the willingness, when necessary, to put difficult questions to a cherished work, test an author's conclusions, and acknowledge the limits of one's own interpretations. Kailash Kumar Mishra's book makes several worthwhile beginnings in this direction, even if these beginnings do not always attain full methodological discipline.

Read not as a 'final verdict' but as 'an extensive invitation to critical dialogue', the volume's significance becomes evident. Its insistence on understanding the social history of texts, responsiveness to the voices of women and the dispossessed, attention to the pain of modern migration, and questions concerning Mithilā's archival memory establish a rich intellectual terrain.

Deeper literary work on this terrain would require close reading of poetic lines, analysis of the novel's narrative organisation, systematic references to primary texts, multisource verification of historical facts, and a fair hearing for competing interpretations.

In the final reckoning, 'Bookmania' is valuable despite its incompleteness. Its value does not lie in answering every literary question; rather, it places readers in a position to hear many questions arising between Maithili literature and Mithilā's social life. When criticism tests even its favourite texts by the combined standards of evidence, doubt, and beauty, love of books becomes genuine literary discernment. This is the most productive conclusion to emerge from a reading of 'Bookmania'.

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Manasarabī

Caste, Women's Experience, and the Unanswered Question of Justice

An Extended Literary-Critical Study of Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra's Novel

Abstract

Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra's 'Manasarabī' joins feudal pressure in the village, caste hierarchies, dependence on debt, women's labour, and the unequal social consequences of love within a single narrative. The relationship between Bulki and Rāghab, the love of Nainā and Nand, Mahānand's cruelty, Saudāminī's capacity for decision, and Lakhru's consciousness of guilt constitute distinct axes of the story. The central argument of this study is that the novel's moral order, founded on the doctrine that actions bear corresponding consequences, comes under question in its final episode when it confronts the incompleteness of Bulki's life. The rural world of material things, folk songs, living dialogue, and the representation of women's social choices are notable achievements of the work; yet the disproportionately extended descriptions of the female body, didactic narration, easy moral sanctioning of revenge, and uneven narrative proportions require critical scrutiny. Reading the text comparatively alongside contemporary responses, this study demonstrates that the value of 'Manasarabī' resides not in the certainty of its final dispensation of justice but in leaving open the difficult question of a life denied justice.

Keywords: Manasarabī; Bulki; Maithili novel; caste and class relations; women's experience; rural labour; folk culture; justice; narrative technique

Introduction: The Novel's Central Question

In the closing episode of 'Manasarabī', Rāghab asks himself: as the deed, so the consequence—but why has there been so much suffering in Bulki's life? This is the novel's most serious literary question. Over fifteen parts, the narrative shows the downfall of usurers, sexual predators, violent men, and the arrogant. Yet at the last moment the unfulfilled life of a hardworking and loving woman, unwilling to submit to injustice, calls into question this entire conception of moral recompense. Because of this contradiction, it is inadequate to read 'Manasarabī' merely as a rural love story or a tale of the punishment of evildoers. It is a narrative with multiple centres of gravity: power, the body, land, caste, poverty, love, social respectability, and justice.

Rather than retelling the plot, this study concentrates on the places where the author's intentions and the reader's moral judgment interrogate one another. Bulki's refusal and resistance, Nand's movement from revenge towards love, the affection Mahānand shows within his household and his cruelty beyond it, Rāghab's generosity and hesitation, and Lakhru's guilt all take shape and come undone within the same social order. Read in relation to one another, these episodes bring the narrative's underlying ethical tensions into focus.

1. Bibliographical Description and the Author's Creative Self-Disclosure

'Manasarabī' is a Maithili novel by Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra. Its first edition was published by Maitreyi Prakashan, Delhi, in 2025, with ISBN 978-81-986846-4-6. The narrative runs through fifteen numbered parts, from 'One' to 'Fifteen'. The author dedicates the book to his maternal grandmother, Śrīmatī Bālmukhī Devī, from whom, he writes, he acquired the art of understanding stories and fashioning narratives. This dedication is not simply an expression of familial sentiment: it also offers an initial indication of the place occupied in the novel's art by oral storytelling, simile, proverbial expressions, and the speech of ordinary people.

In 'Monak Bāt' ('A Word from the Heart'), the author describes the work as 'like truth' but not truth itself: an artistic elaboration of the imagination. He argues that a storyteller ought to try to understand the hearts of other characters by moving beyond boundaries of gender, caste, class, and geography. Rather than accepting this intention merely as the writer's declaration, it must be tested against the representation of women's experience and the critique of social dominance within the story. The author's claim to a reality grounded in experience is not proof of documentary truth; it expresses an ethical aspiration in the making of fiction.

The history of the novel's composition is also important. The author initially posted instalments of the story on social media; encouraged by the responses, he devised an outline in fifteen parts. He himself records the interruptions of the coronavirus period and the rewriting from memory of passages lost from his computer. Encouragement from Ushakiran Khan and the difficulties of rewriting figure in his account. This information certainly suggests that the novel is the result both of the energy of serial narration and of subsequent recomposition; there is, however, no independent manuscript evidence establishing which parts were written first or which passages were altered.

2. Narrative Design in Fifteen Parts: From Love to Resistance and the Final Question

The opening two parts establish the story's foundations: caste divisions within the village, the labour of an Amāt family, Bulki's child marriage and return from her marital home, her mutual love with Rāghab, and Rājkānt's sexual abuse. Meanwhile, the terrifying character of Mahānand's moneylending becomes visible in the episode ending in Nīras's death. The third part introduces Rāghab's mother's care for a former oppressor and Nand's entry into collective resistance. From the fourth through the sixth parts, the relationship between Nainā and Nand, the thorny vegetation of kharahori, the serpent pair, the pond, folk songs, and the conflict over revenge develop together.

From the seventh through the tenth parts, the collective plan to cut Mahānand's paddy, Saudāminī's familial constraints, Lakhru's wrestling and criminal actions, the murder of Rāmbābū, the fear and apparitional experiences following

that killing, Lakhru's bodily decline, and the reunion of Bulki and Rāghab continually intersect. Parts eleven through thirteen centre on the impossible love of Nainā and Nand, Nainā's ill-matched marriage, sexual violence within marriage, her death, Mahānand's grief, and Saudāminī's rebuilding of her life. The final two parts conclude with Bulki's return, her direct resistance to Rājkānt, a new episode of land-grabbing, separation in old age, and the gift of an anklet.

A distinguishing feature of this construction is that even when Bulki, the central character, disappears from view for several episodes, she never disappears from the novel's system of values. During her absence the narrator exposes other structures of oppression in the village. When the narrative returns to Bulki, readers understand that her struggle is not merely the result of an individual misfortune but the outcome of a broader social structure. Nevertheless, the prolonged Lakhru–Rāmbābū episode sometimes slackens the movement of the main narrative line. This is both a strength and a limitation of the design.

3. The Name 'Manasarabī': From a Village Appellation to Self-Definition

The book does not offer a separate dictionary etymology for the word 'Manasarabī'. To invent its meaning arbitrarily would therefore be inappropriate. Within the narrative, confronting Bulki's resistance, Rājkānt comes to understand why people address her by that name; later a bhaujī, or elder brother's wife, also uses it in affectionate teasing. Here the appellation emerges in connection with a woman's fearlessness, her ability to speak her own mind, her dissent from social control, and her self-respect.

In the final confrontation Bulki herself reminds Rājkānt that they call her 'Manasarabī', and invites him to see her resistance. The moment is particularly charged: a name that society might have used to signify ridicule, fear, or an inconvenient disposition becomes, through Bulki, a courageous declaration of public identity. The meaning of the title unfolds in this change of context; its social use matters more than any fixed lexical definition.

This trajectory of the name also reveals the novel's fundamental irony. Bulki is Manasarabī, but she is not all-powerful. Despite her capacity for labour, fearless speech, and self-respect, inequalities of class, caste, and gender repeatedly constrain her. Independent desire and socially enforced necessity coexist in her character. The writer's achievement lies in refusing to reconcile these two truths completely in a simple celebration of victory.

4. Bulki: Labour, the Body, and the Right to Decide for Herself

Bulki is the daughter of an Amāt family. Fields and commons, the cutting of grass, tending livestock, transplanting and harvesting paddy, handling dung, and domestic labour are central activities in the making of her character. She is surrounded by the labour of the women of her family, while the narrator describes in detail the small transactions of the rural economy: a trellis made from two bamboo poles, the vines of gourds and pumpkins, milk from cattle, sharecropping, and wage labour. Labour here is not mere background. It forms

Bulki's intelligence, her intimacy with nature, and her disposition towards self-reliance.

Bulki's work: the bamboo trellis, cultivation, and self-reliance

She is married at the age of ten. Later, after living in her husband's household, she says unequivocally that she will not go back. Neither her parents nor society nor the village council can persuade her to change her decision. Initially the narrator does not disclose the reason in full; the later narrative clarifies that forced sexual relations with her husband form one dimension of her suffering. The sequence is significant: what appears to society as obstinacy acquires a very different ethical meaning when approached through the woman's private experience.

Yet Bulki's independence does not amount to economic security. Her labour sustains the family's life, but uncertainty about the future after her parents' death, her brother's neglect, and illness in old age leave her vulnerable. Having initially refused the proposal of another match, in the final part she says that she nevertheless entered a second marriage to preserve her parents' honour; that husband too proved violent. This turn does not invalidate her first resolve. Rather, it shows the long duration of social pressure and the narrowing choices of a life. Because the second marriage is not depicted in an extended scene, the change can also seem somewhat abrupt.

5. The Bamboo Trellis and the Bodily Politics of Exploitation

The two bamboo poles offered by Rājkānt initially appear to be a form of economic assistance. A trellis at Bulki's home would let vines spread, vegetables grow, and difficulties over food diminish. This modest need discloses the true measure of rural deprivation. But Rājkānt regards his favour as a certificate of

entitlement to a woman's body. The author makes clear that his feeling is lust rather than 'love', and that the mentality of usury pervades his conduct. Money, indebtedness, labour, and sexual violence become different expressions of a single relation of domination.

Early in the narrative, Rājkānt forces a sexual encounter. Bulki has the capacity to resist, but the prospect of retaliation against her father and family, economic dependency, and fear of a powerful household hold her back. To call this consent would contradict the evidence of the narrative. Afterwards the novel presents her silence, shame, and inwardly sustained desire for revenge. A woman's self-blame after sexual violence is itself shaped by an oppressive social culture. Her avoidance of Rāghab's gaze is evidence of this state of mind, not of culpability.

In the final part Rājkānt attempts to attack Bulki again. This time she throws him down, takes up a sickle, makes him plead for his life, and extracts a vow that he will never again mistreat any woman. Her action joins personal resistance to a demand for the protection of women collectively. Yet the attempt to secure justice through threat and humiliation also poses another question: when institutions and the community refuse to stand with the victim, what are the ethical limits of violent self-defence? The narrative offers no legal resolution to this question, but it makes social abandonment unmistakable.

6. Rāghab and Bulki: The Truth of Affection and the Failure of Respectability

Rāghab belongs to an economically impoverished Brahmin family; Bulki to an Amāt family of labourers. Their love grows amid the shared division of village labour, water sources, groves, and fields. The scene of removing a thorn is especially meaningful: Rāghab is dependent, Bulki the healer. Practical skill, courage, and the knowledge of care are in Bulki's hands. The storyteller presents her simultaneously as lover, mother, and healer. The scene reverses the usual associations of formal education with knowledge and caste status with competence, placing lived experience and practical knowledge on the other side.

Their meeting on a stormy, rain-filled night reveals bodily intimacy. The narrative understands this as an expression of mutual affection, establishing a sharp contrast with Rājkānt's violence. At a subsequent meeting, however, Rāghab abruptly withdraws for fear of public shame. The storyteller himself questions the effect of this hesitation on Bulki's feelings. This self-questioning is significant: even an educated, sensitive man cannot rise above the unequal social risks attached to public reputation.

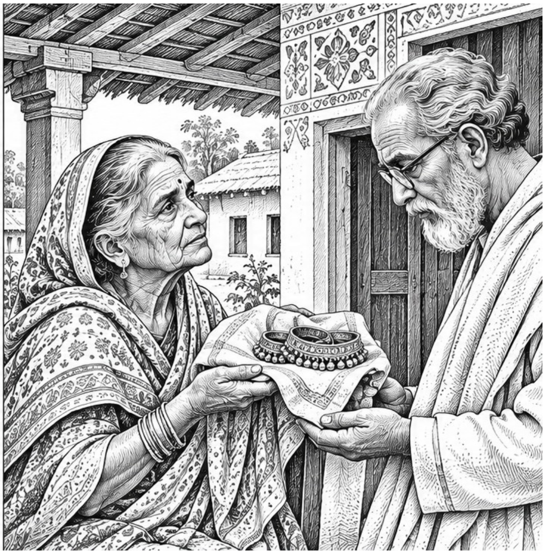
Between Rāghab's marriage to Chandrakalā and his permanent social separation from Bulki, the author places emphasis on the 'spiritual' nature of love. But romantic language is insufficient here. Rāghab obtains the secure and legally sanctioned home of marriage; Bulki is left with enduring insecurity, labour, violence, and neglect. Placing this unequal outcome at the centre reveals the

ethical complexity of the relationship. Rāghab's affection may be genuine, but so are the limits of his social power—or of his willingness to exercise it.

7. The Anklet, the Refusal of Assistance, and the Extraordinary Dignity of the Ending

At their final meeting, Rāghab at first resolves not to see the old, ill, and helpless Bulki because he fears confronting her changed appearance. His wish to preserve in his imagination the image of a young woman reveals, alongside sympathy, the limits of a beauty-centred gaze. He proposes to send her money. Bulki comes before him and recounts her life; she subsequently returns the ten thousand rupees he offers. Her refusal should not be mistaken for the glorification of poverty. It is a declaration of the self-determination she still possesses: she wishes to determine for herself the final meaning of her life.

Bulki gives Rāghab the anklet her mother had given her at marriage and asks him to have his wife wear it. The anklet becomes a single material embodiment of a woman's marriage, maternal memory, unfinished love, and propertyless old age. To praise the gift simply as an act of sublime renunciation would conceal its pain. The anklet is a silent witness to the marital security denied her, Rāghab's established household, and the unequal destinies of the two. Rāghab's silence here becomes more eloquent than any speech of his.



The anklet: memory, unequal destinies, and the dignity of refusal

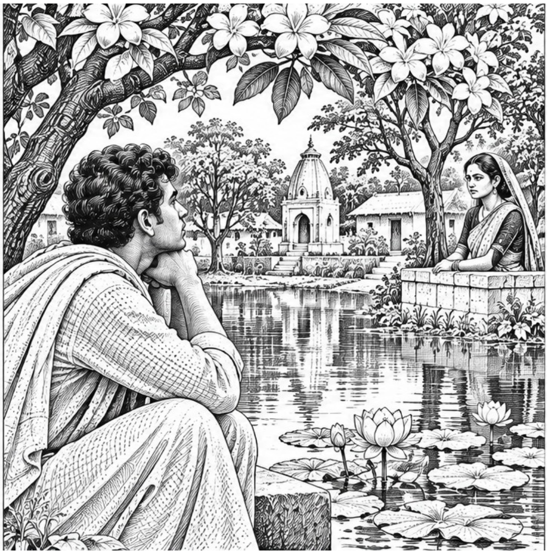
The author explicitly draws a comparison at this point: the pride of the educated Rāghab in his knowledge is shattered, while the unschooled Bulki teaches him human values. The novel's moral centre moves away from caste, formal education, and property to the lived experience of a working woman. Yet this

literary elevation does not erase her material suffering; precisely this contradiction gives the final question its sting.

8. Nand and Nainā: From a Plot of Revenge to the Humanisation of Love

Mahānand's insult and beating of Nand kindle a desire for revenge. Nand initially plans to punish the father for his injustice through his daughter Nainā, making a woman the instrument of hostility between men. He states this intention openly to Rāghab, who objects: why avenge the father's offence upon an innocent daughter? The exchange is a decisive ethical turn in the novel, for through a character's own speech the author exposes and criticises the gendered logic by which violence generates retaliatory violence.

At first Nainā is unaware of Nand's concealed objective. In her perception, the path through the marshy ground, thorns of kharahori, seven champa flowers in Nand's hand, water in the pond, and a pair of snakes all become signs of love. Nand's perspective changes gradually: after his experience by the pond, the author describes the growth of love in him in place of revenge. This transformation is a moral possibility within the plot, although the suggestion that bodily attraction can abruptly erase revenge seems somewhat hasty in psychological terms. Rāghab's advice, Nainā's trust, and Nand's own experience together give the transformation a relatively firmer basis.



Love and prohibition: the pond and the village's divided world

Nainā later discovers Nand's original design and demands an admission in direct conversation. Nand resorts neither to deception nor to a lie: he confesses that what began as pretence subsequently became love. Their dialogue constitutes an ethical test of love: where trust began in deception, its restoration requires truth-

telling. Nainā forgives him, but the social order of the novel will not permit a marriage between persons of the same gotra.

9. Shared Gotra, the Power of Wealth, and Nainā's Marital Calamity

Nainā and Nand are said to belong to the same gotra; within the novel's social world this becomes an impediment to marriage. The economic distance between them is also considerable: Nainā comes from a wealthy, dominant household, Nand from a comparatively poor family. Nainā explains both obstacles to her sister Mīnā. This does not mean that every community holds an identical view of marriage within a gotra. Rather, it is the belief governing the family and community depicted in the novel. The author treats this prohibition as an immutable social force within the unfolding events.

At their final meeting Nainā willingly accepts intimacy with Nand, but afterwards also states clearly her decision to end the relationship. Nand respects her choice. After her marriage Nainā no longer looks upon him with desire, and he too maintains the boundary. The recognition of a woman's desire, and respect for her right to change her decision, are notable features of the novel.

Yet the marriage deemed legitimate by society becomes for Nainā an everyday experience of domestic and sexual violence. The story explicitly marks the degrading conduct of her husband Sudhīr Chaudharī; her health deteriorates and eventually she dies. Her final concern is that her younger sister Mīnā must not be married to her violent husband. Her mother Saudāminī prevents that repetition. Here the narrative exposes with particular sharpness the distance between a socially sanctioned marriage and a woman's genuinely secure life. The medical cause of Nainā's death is not established definitively in the text. To assume that she dies solely from separation would be a reductive interpretation.

10. Saudāminī: Judgment, Grief, and Reconstruction Within the Household

Saudāminī experiences directly the contrast between Mahānand's cruelty outside the home and his affection for his daughters within it. She does not approve of her husband's exploitation of the poor, but opposition is constrained within a domineering family. The author places her in a position comparable to Vibhīṣaṇa's. The analogy is appropriate only insofar as we recognise that knowing right from wrong and being able to act effectively against wrongdoing are different social conditions. Familial affection cannot become an absolution for oppression.

Amid Nainā's illness, death, and Mahānand's subsequent collapse, Saudāminī develops from a figure of grief into a person capable of making decisions. Preventing Sudhīr's attempt to marry Mīnā, giving precedence to compatibility of age and temperament in arranging marriages for her other three daughters, and distancing herself from the village's oppressive property conflicts are stages of her increasing autonomy. Eventually she sells a share of the property and acquires land and rooms to rent in Muzaffarpur, thereby establishing a regular means of livelihood.

Saudāminī's story demonstrates that women's liberation in the novel is not restricted to the choice of a lover. In widowhood, economic planning, refusal of violent relationships, judicious intervention in her daughters' futures, and departure from an unsafe village also constitute forms of resistance. Unlike Bulki, however, Saudāminī has a foundation in property. This difference is indispensable to understanding the outcomes of their lives.

11. Rāghab's Mother: Compassion as the Opposite of Revenge

Rāghab's mother constitutes a third ethical centre of the narrative. An old man who once forcibly secured the transfer of land from her father-in-law has, in old age, become neglected, hungry, and dependent. She cooks jackfruit curry, rice, lentils, chutney, and curd for him and takes the food herself. The old man acknowledges his offence and expresses a wish to return the land, but Rāghab's mother gives priority to service and blessing. In place of punitive retaliation she offers a response founded in humanity.

Giving milk to Nīras's suffering family and rescuing a helpless woman caught in an attack by a swarm of wasps also extend the social reach of her character. This woman resists, but where her resistance takes a violent form, its aim is to save life, not to exact revenge. Several sources of Rāghab's moral education may be sought in her conduct.

Nevertheless, such compassion cannot replace institutional justice. When an oppressor seizes land and the injured remain trapped in debt, the generosity of one good woman does not transform the system. The story illuminates the power of kindness while leaving unanswered how the next generation might be protected from the same wrongs.

12. Mahānand's Power: The Moneylender's Ledger, Forced Labour, and a Web of Fear

'Rāvaṇa's Lineage' becomes the novel's name for the local order of domination. Extending credit, refusing to cancel names in the account books, forcing transfers of land, imposing unpaid labour, public beatings, and predatory conduct towards women are links in one socioeconomic apparatus. Fear arises not simply from Mahānand's physical strength but from a network of debt, land, caste-gotra prestige, and allied households. The initial descriptions of village strata provide the background for this wider configuration.

The episode of Nīras represents this violence in an extreme form. Because repayment of a small loan is delayed, Mahānand savagely injures the elderly labourer; after prolonged suffering Nīras dies. His wife's pleas, the milk supplied by Rāghab's mother, and the silence of the frightened village together show the social consequences. The crime cannot be confined to the personal disposition of one brutal man. The powerlessness of witnesses, the vulnerability of the weak, and the absence of effective sanctions provide its enabling circumstances.

In the final part of the novel, Rājkānt's misuse of his knowledge of land measurement offers a new form of the same structure. He possesses educated political vocabulary and knowledge of demarcation, yet uses them to reduce even the homestead of a poor Dom family. The implication is that the instruments of exploitation may change—from the usurer's ledger to a survey document—while the misery of people without secure rights remains.

13. Caste and Class: Interconnected but Not Identical

The novel portrays the coexistence of Brahmins, Amāts, Mallāhs, Dhānuks, Doms, Dusādhs, and other working groups. The relentless labour of Amāt women, the insecure housing of a Dom family, the debt dependence of a Brahmin household, and the dominance of a wealthy Brahmin family create several levels of economic position within the same caste order. It is clear that the author perceives class differences within castes. Yet caste-based humiliation and deprivation must not be dissolved into a general category of class poverty.

At one point Rāghab declares that the condition of his impoverished Brahmin family is worse 'even than that of Dalits'. This is the utterance of a character expressing anger and his perception of his own experience; it cannot be accepted as a proven sociological comparison. The historical forms of exclusion by caste and the economic suffering of a poor upper-caste household may intersect, but they are not equivalent. Maintaining this critical distinction makes the multiple levels of deprivation already present within the novel more clearly visible.

Awanish Kumar's 2022 field study, based on two villages in northern Bihar, examines the interrelations among unequal landholding, sharecropping, and caste structures. The study does not authenticate the time period of the novel or events in its particular village. It supplies only a comparative social background against which such rural relations may be understood as broader questions. The distinction between the literary truth of the novel and the methods by which field-study data are established must be preserved.

14. Collective Resistance and Its Ethical Double Edge

Nand associates himself with Communist activists in order to oppose oppression. At a secret meeting Rāghab proposes that Mahānand should be struck economically rather than subjected to physical attack. The ears of paddy from his four bighas are cut during the night; approximately 110 people take part. The author presents the success as a moment of collective power and the breaking of the oppressed people's fear.

The episode has a concrete social meaning: an isolated poor person is unsafe in resisting, whereas organisation lends courage. Even so, it would be wrong to present the method of cutting the paddy as lawful or as a universally applicable system of justice. Economic retaliation succeeds in the story, but women are not among the participants, nor does a durable system of land rights for labourers emerge. The moral energy of collective action and its limits must both be examined.

In the final part Rājkānt too is described as having read books on Communist ideas and having joined movements when convenient, while continuing to seize land and abuse women. The writer exposes the gap between ideological designation and conduct. Nevertheless, the actions of fictional characters do not permit universal conclusions about the history of political parties; criticism must remain within the evidence of their represented behaviour.

15. Lakhru Khalīfā and Rāmbābū: Strength, Crime, and Inward Fear

Lakhru's story initially displays the training of a village wrestler: the discipline of the wrestling ground, milk, practice, guru, and a path to prestige. The father's social insecurity becomes the political misuse of the son's physical strength. The death of his teacher Gāmā Khalīfā, addiction to palm liquor and spirits, a violent circle of associates, and familial quarrels accelerate his decline. When bodily strength is detached from moral discipline, it becomes a means of terror instead of protection.

Akhil Singh secretly resolves to have his intoxicated and violent son Rāmbābū murdered. Lakhru becomes a killer for hire. The decision displays a terrifying internal conflict among Akhil's fatherhood, fear of humiliation, family honour, and criminal intent. Following Rāmbābū's death, the father is broken by guilt. Thereafter, the dead man's voice, spectral shadows, illness, and fear begin to inhabit Lakhru's life.

The author also constructs scenes of an independently existing ghost, while describing Lakhru's dreams, sickness, and guilty consciousness. To declare the experience either merely a medical delusion or an indisputably supernatural event would reduce the work's plurality of possible meanings. At the literary level it is an unsettling metaphor for 'crime returning to inhabit the body'. But to regard cancer, diabetes, paralysis, or a brain tumour in actual life as divine punishment for wrongdoing would be medically untenable. The narrative fashions a poetic structure of moral destiny, not a scientific account of causation.

16. The Doctrine of Karmic Consequences and the Exception of Bulki

Throughout the novel we repeatedly hear declarations about the blows dealt by time, the fruits of action, the downfall of the wicked, and the moral superiority of the innocent. The usurer loses his wealth; the bully's body becomes weak; the murderer is surrounded by fear; the oppressor's family disintegrates. The extended description of Lakhru's progressive illnesses almost turns this moral proposition into an exemplum. In several places the narrator invokes the notion of a 'karmic age': heaven and hell are experienced here on earth.

But Bulki is no wrongdoer. She labours in the fields, supports her family, survives violence, loves, and resists when necessary. Even so, her old age is full of sickness, insecurity, and solitude. The question arising in Rāghab's mind in the closing episode—why did this happen to Bulki?—undoes the moral arithmetic asserted earlier in the novel. In this one question the narrator moves beyond his fixed, didactic voice and stands before the uncertainty of lived experience.

From this perspective, the final sentence, which signals not the 'completion' but the 'beginning' of the whole episode, is more than a device for arousing curiosity about a sequel. It also leaves open the space in which readers must ask new questions: if an image of justice is satisfied merely by the suffering of the oppressor, who will account for the unfinished life of the victim? From that question springs the novel's most enduring effect.

17. Folk Culture: Songs, Proverbs, and Ethical Memory

Folk songs in 'Manasarabī' are not decorative interpolations. Bulki's nachārī and maheśvānī songs, Nainā's songs of love and separation, lines from Vidyāpati, dawn songs, the plaintive cry of the khajan bird, proverbial verses and sayings—all offer accessible, culturally rooted means of articulating the characters' inner states. As Nainā falls in love, the rhythms of songs change; the account of a longing for a son in Mahānand's household becomes associated with a bird's call; an old man's repentance finds expression in a dawn song. The folk voice here gives private pain a dimension of collective hearing.

A particularly noteworthy external reference is the author's research essay 'Classification and Structure of Maithili Folksongs', available on the website of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. The essay examines distinct forms of songs associated with the life cycle, seasons, agriculture, devotion, nachārī-maheśvānī, love and separation, and knowledge. A thematic affinity is evident between the novel's various folk-song forms and this scholarly interest. That affinity, however, does not establish that any particular song in the novel was taken directly from a particular instance of the author's field research; such a claim would require separate evidence.

A method of reading the songs is also necessary. Some are sung by characters; others appear as forms of the narrator's remembered culture. It would be wrong to treat all of them indiscriminately as the author's original verse compositions. Quotations from folk poetry function within the narrative as the cultural recollections of characters; their original histories of composition cannot be established from this novel alone.

18. Nature: Not a Backdrop but an Active Environment That Makes Meaning

Kharahori, sābe grass, kaar, ponds, jāṭhi, mango groves, ears of paddy, champa blossoms, serpent and serpentess, and rain are more than locations for events in 'Manasarabī'. The removal of a thorn brings bodily pain and the intimacy of love together. Rain creates the circumstances of Rāghab and Bulki's physical union. The thicket of coarse grass transforms Nainā's fear into trust in Nand. The fluidity of the pond's water becomes an image of love's secrecy.

The serpent-pair scene has three stages: first terror, then the calming of fear through Bulki's folk knowledge, and finally the pair becoming a symbol of love in Nainā's perception. It is a fine example of changing meanings given to one natural phenomenon. Characters project their emotional states upon nature; nature itself issues neither a command to love nor a moral prohibition. This

awareness makes the novel's images drawn from nature more psychologically complex.

Descriptions of nature include an extensive local world of things: vines and vegetation, millet, cultivation, fields, trellises, curd, medicinal uses of grass, varieties of mango, and sources of water. Such detail lends the text the material texture of rural life. Sometimes, however, ornamentation weighs more heavily than the scene warrants; numerous comparisons between a woman's body and natural objects halt the forward movement of the story. Natural description thus appears at times original and at others overextended.

19. The Narrator: Omniscient Perspective, Interior Voices, and Commentary

The novel's primary narrator tells events in the third person while also claiming access to the minds of characters. Rāghab's dilemma, Bulki's fear, Nand's revenge, Nainā's dreams, Mahānand's paternal affection, and Lakhru's guilt are all disclosed to the reader. Moving from one character's viewpoint to another without formal notification is a characteristic narrative procedure. This omniscience produces a broad social panorama, but at times leaves the reader too little room to arrive at an independent judgment.

The storyteller offers direct moral commentary: someone treats a woman's body as a consumable object; someone else is intoxicated by wealth; this or that is how karma bears fruit. Such commentary accords with an orally inflected, folktale-like voice. It gives the reader moral direction, yet occasionally restricts the possibilities of literature's indirect resonance. The suffering of Nīras, for example, is already so intense that the moral proclamation following it becomes comparatively unnecessary.

The passage of time is uneven. Nīras's seventeen days of suffering, the minutes occupied in removing a thorn, Nainā's walk through kharahori, and the lovers' meetings receive exceptional expansion; elsewhere years encompassing marriage, sickness, migration, and death pass within a few short paragraphs. When these techniques of temporal dilation and compression affect important transformations in a character, an artistic question arises: which moments in whose life have been granted the fuller right to narration?

20. Dialogue, Spoken Registers, and Linguistic Form

The most vivid achievement of the book is the social diversity of its dialogue. Labourers' everyday speech, affectionate forms of address, the anxieties of elders, the aggression of wealthy creditors, the arguments of the educated Rāghab, Nand's political slogans, and the teasing exchanges among women produce distinct voices. Through choices among 'ahā̃', 'tō', 'chhauk', 'chhaik', 'chhathin', and related forms, characters express distance, intimacy, and differences in status. This variation is part of the novel's linguistic wealth. To impose editorial 'uniformity' and convert all of its spoken registers into standard prose would be a literary loss.

The author's prose abounds in folk similes, idioms, interrogative addresses, and impassioned sentences. The unschooled Bulki's practical intelligence and the educated Rāghab's moral hesitation are revealed through the very construction of their utterances. At times irregular punctuation, repetitions that add little meaning, and an excess of exclamation marks distance readers from the scene. The narration could be tightened without sacrificing the vitality of the vocabulary.

There are also a few inconsistencies in the use of names. In a reference to Nainā's father, 'Mahākānt' appears at one point instead of 'Mahānand'; in Rājkānt's final episode the name 'Sohan' occurs. Such local inconsistencies interrupt concentration. Nevertheless, a distinction is necessary between the writer's linguistic practice and printing errors. A character's vernacular must not be treated as defective merely because it differs from standard usage.

21. Women's Perspectives and the Narrating Gaze upon Women's Bodies

The novel establishes an ethical distinction between women's consent and refusal. Bulki's sexual experience within marriage and Rājkānt's violence are presented as coercion; Nainā's last meeting with Nand is an instance of her articulated desire; Sudhīr's domestic sexual abuse is firmly condemned. Consequently, readers are invited to question the idea that family or marriage confers an automatic entitlement to a woman's body.

Yet in numerous scenes the narrator dwells at length on women characters' breasts, thighs, skin, and bodily contours; descriptions of the adolescent Nainā also fall within this gaze. A contradiction emerges: the author supports women's autonomy, but the narrative camera sometimes turns away from their consciousness to linger over the spectator's enjoyment of their bodies. Criticism must not conceal this contradiction. Literary recognition of a woman's experience is achieved not by describing her physical attraction alone, but by giving sufficient space to her decisions, labour, fear, alternatives, and speech.

This criticism does not entail the wholesale rejection of the novel's erotic mode. The question is not whether erotic sentiment is present, but which character is seen through which gaze, who can voice desire, and who is merely looked at. Bulki's gift of the anklet is the most powerful scene in this respect, for there memory, poverty, speech, and self-respect—not the body—become the centre of meaning.

22. Religious Images, Compassion, and Social Justice

Śiva, the Goddess, the fruits of action, comparisons with Rāvaṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa from the Rāmāyaṇa, suggestions of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā's play in water, and Vidyāpati's love songs coexist in the narrative. Bulki's Monday worship is a means of sustaining personal resolve; after Mahānand's cruelty Nīras's wife asks Bholā Bābā for justice; in adversity Saudāminī draws upon religious memory. Faith is part of the characters' actual emotional world; to dismiss it summarily as superstition would be an injustice to the text.

Nevertheless, the novel also leaves the question of what arrangements society creates for justice beyond prayers and curses. Nīras dies; Bulki's family lives in fear; a Dom family's homestead is reduced. These episodes place material inequalities beside spiritual meanings. To read 'Manasarabī' as an unbroken endorsement of a system of supernatural justice would therefore be mistaken; the final question of the novel itself discloses the human limits of that belief.

Rāghab's mother and Saudāminī turn religion towards compassion and discrimination, while oppressive characters can also assume religious appearances. The later reference to Rājkānt's counterfeit devotion to Śiva clarifies the distinction: ritual and conduct can diverge. Religiosity here guarantees no improvement in character; it is one setting in which character is tested.

23. Contemporary Readers' Responses and Critical Opinions

A review published by Jagadānand Jha 'Manu' on 30 August 2025 praises 'Manasarabī' for its inter-caste love, rural sensibility, pictorial language, and narrative interest. It also notes some spelling errors. This is an important document of early reception, but an appreciative response is not identical with a comprehensive critical analysis of the text. The questions concerning Bulki's final situation, the narrative gaze upon women's bodies, and the ethical uncertainty of collective retaliation arise, nonetheless, from the primary novel itself.

A response by Sanjay Jha 'Nāgadah', dated 8 September 2025, praises the representation of ordinary life and culture and the work's 'truth-like' inventiveness. The commentator himself indicates that this is an immediate notice of his encounter with the book and expresses a wish to write an extended review later. Its evidentiary value is therefore confined here to the novel's initial reception.

The publisher's catalogue confirms the title, author, and ISBN. The research essay on the classification of Maithili songs, available under the author's name from the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, provides independent external evidence of his interest in folk literature. It does not warrant the assertion that all the episodes of the novel reproduce the author's autobiography or events in an actual village. The caution contained in the author's phrase 'like truth' must also be preserved in external scholarship.

24. A Thematic Dialogue with the Maithili Novelistic Tradition

A published academic review of Harimohan Jha's 'Kanyādān' identifies women's education and ill-matched marriage as major concerns. This offers a thematic context within which Nainā's marriage across a sharp difference in age and Bulki's child marriage in 'Manasarabī' can be connected to longstanding social concerns in Maithili prose. But any conclusion about the comprehensive similarity of the two works, or about direct influence, would require a separate comparative reading. What is indicated here is common ground in the problems addressed, not a claim of literary descent.

The distinctive place of 'Manasarabī' lies in the fact that women's desire is not detached from questions of land, labour, and social retaliation. The prohibition upon Nainā's love is bound to religious and gotra conventions; Bulki's suffering to indebtedness and bullying; Saudāminī's survival to economic reconstruction; and Rāghab's inner conflict to class-shaped respectability. Such layering takes the work beyond the confines of a tragic tale about a single pair of lovers.

25. Artistic Achievements and Reasoned Objections

Among the novel's principal achievements are its concrete descriptions of rural labour, lively vernacular speech, women characters with different moral dispositions, the combined structure of love and exploitation, Nand's change of mind, Saudāminī's economic decisions, and Bulki's final encounter with the anklet. In several places the distinction between women's consent and violence is particularly clear. Many scenes—the milk brought to Nīras's family, the serpent pair in the kharahori, the secret cutting of paddy, Nainā's final plea—possess the power to remain in readers' memories.

The critical difficulties are no less real: repeatedly ornamented descriptions of women's bodies; the overly simple moral sequence in which crime inevitably produces punishment through illness; abrupt changes in some characters' inner lives; the disproportionate space allotted to Lakhru's episode; recurring authorial preaching; local inconsistencies in important names; and the compression of very consequential years in the older Bulki's life. All pose challenges to artistic concentration. To mention them is not to diminish the novel's importance, but to understand its actual organisation without exaggeration.

In particular, the author's initial declaration that one should enter imaginatively into hearts across differences of gender, caste, and class ought to become a criterion of evaluation. Bulki's labour, Nainā's constraints, and Saudāminī's economic judgment realise that declaration to a considerable degree; the extensive scrutiny of women's bodies from a masculine vantage point at times works against the very same achievement. To acknowledge this tension is to respect the book's complexity.

26. Conclusion: Beyond Karmic Recompense, the Testimony of a Life Without Justice

The story of 'Manasarabī' demonstrates that injustice is not merely the deed of one villain in a village, but a set of relations composed of familial domination, debt, social respectability, impunity for gendered violence, caste-based inequality, and property rights. Against these relations the narrative sets several answers: the compassion of Rāghab's mother, Nand's collective organisation, Saudāminī's economic self-determination, and Bulki's direct resistance. None proves sufficient by itself.

By depicting the downfall of the wicked, the book sometimes affords readers satisfaction. At the end, confronted with Bulki's life, that satisfaction itself

comes to seem illegitimate. She raises her voice for her rights, resists her oppressor, understands the value of love, yet finds no lasting security. The novel's ultimate achievement is therefore not the certainty of a moral lesson but the breaking of that certainty. In Rāghab's question, both author and reader must stop and reconsider their understanding of justice.

In this sense the little red packet containing the anklet becomes the novel's most concentrated material image: the memory remaining in a woman's life, whose value cannot be measured in the money of the marketplace. Behind the gift, the art of storytelling learned from a grandmother, the village's vernacular, labour in the fields, unfinished love, and the whole narrative of social cruelty converge at a single point. After reading 'Manasarabī' one question remains: if the fruits of action constitute justice, why is the reckoning of justice owed to Bulki still outstanding? Because the question remains unanswered, the novel continues within the reader even after it has ended.

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Videha Maithili Treatises, Essays, and Criticism: Folk Creativity, Travel, and Literary Judgment

A Critical Study of Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra's Essays, Travel Narratives, and Fiction Criticism

Introduction to the Volume and Critical Premises

To describe *Videha Maithili Prabandha–Nibandha–Samālocanā* (*Videha–Sadeha* 10) simply as a collection of essays, on the ground of its diversity of subjects, would be inadequate. It is a book in which Mithilā's painting traditions, the lives of Indigenous communities in northeastern India, the pilgrimage culture of Braj, political dialogue in public life, and Maithili's village-centred fiction are brought into relation through the observational perspective of a single writer. First-hand experience, cultural interpretation, personal memory, and literary evaluation constitute its principal modes of expression. Here the term "criticism" signifies not merely passing judgment on literary works but also examining the prevailing assumptions of society.

The title page identifies an edition dated 2012 and gives the publication particulars of Shruti Prakashan. Editorial responsibility is assigned to Gajendra Thakur and co-editorial responsibility to Umesh Mandal. The essays, travel accounts, and literary reviews listed in the contents are published under the name of Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra. The coexistence of the three generic designations—*prabandha* (treatise), *nibandha* (essay), and *samālocanā* (criticism)—in the book's description is significant. It invites us to read authorial experience not within the confines of a single genre but through the interaction of several prose forms.

The collection comprises nine creative units: "Mithila Painting: Past, Present, and Future"; under "Wanderings," "Haflong," "Vrindavan: Of Feeling, Enjoyment, and Yoga," "Lower Dibang Valley: The Extraordinary World of the Idu Mishmi Community," "Malik Bhai's Wayside Reflections," "Uttarakhand's Nanda Raj Jat," and "Sangaiprau: A Legacy of Remembering Naga Ancestors"; followed by the reviews of *Gāmaka Jinagī* (*Village Life*) and *Jīvan Saṅgharṣa* (*The Struggle of Life*). The opening treatment of painting, the six intervening travel accounts, and the two concluding literary reviews together give the book a composite form embracing lived folk experience, cultural inquiry, and the assessment of fiction.

A critical study of this collection must distinguish subject matter, speaker, context, and compositional structure. Direct experience during travel cannot be treated as a comprehensive ethnographic finding; nor should affectionate praise for fiction substitute for formal analysis of narrative craft. Alongside the internal affinities among these works, therefore, one must examine the nature of the

evidence they employ, the credibility of their accounts of experience, and the limits of their value judgments.

1. The Collection's Inner Unity: Places Change, the Question Does Not

At first sight, Mithila painting and political conversation on a Delhi pavement seem to have no direct connection. Yet the writer's underlying question is the same in both: who creates a society's cultural meanings, who protects them, and how are those meanings altered by the intervention of power or the market? The transmission of skill from mother to daughter in painting, collective decision-making by Indigenous women in Haflong, ancestral tradition in Sangaiprau, and the practical intelligence of ordinary villagers in Mandal's fiction all present alternative centres of knowledge within their respective spheres.

This underlying thread enhances the text's literary significance. Knowledge here is not solely an achievement of the library; it is the combined outcome of custom, labour, nature, and social experience. But the unity is not wholly free of contradiction. In some places the writer brings forward the independent voices of communities; in others, his own religious, political, or moral preferences dominate the interpretation. The collection's value consequently resides not only in its declared conclusions but also in the tension where observation and prior assumption collide.

Reading together the temporal consciousness of "Past, Present, and Future," the experiential "I" of the travel narratives, and the literary evaluation in *Village Life* makes clear that cultural continuity is an essential value in the writer's thinking. Yet a conflict also emerges between the desire to keep tradition unchanged and the realities of transforming livelihoods. For criticism, recognising this conflict is more productive than offering praise alone.

2. Mithila Painting: The Original Idea of "Parallel Literacy"

"Mithila Painting: Past, Present, and Future" is the most sustained argumentative essay in the collection. The writer does not regard Mithila painting merely as decoration or an object for tourist consumption. In his view, painting enables women to express experience, aspiration, memory, and cultural entitlement. He reads it as a form of "parallel literacy." This interpretation matters because it exposes the difference between formal education in the alphabet and the actual capacity for cultural expression. A woman unfamiliar with written letters may nevertheless give meaning to her world through *aripan* floor designs, *kohbar* paintings, colours, forms, and rituals.

The essay clearly distinguishes three spatial forms of painting: *aripan* on the ground, pictures on walls, and painting on movable objects. References to paste made from *arwa* rice, banana or *mainā* leaves, low wooden seats, clay vessels, *sikki* grass, bamboo, and other materials of everyday life relocate the art from abstract aesthetics to the world of household labour and material practice. The medium of the art itself becomes a document of social history: a symbol is not

simply an object to be viewed, but is connected to someone's festival, marriage, desire, or communal memory.

The writer treats the fish, parrot, lotus, bamboo, sun, moon, elephant, and other motifs within the *kohbar* as bearers of fertility, prosperity, and auspicious wishes. The strength of this reading lies in the conjunction of image and lived occasion. It would be mistaken, however, to assume that the meanings of these symbols remain absolutely uniform across communities, periods, and artists. Separate study of individual artists' works, their caste and social backgrounds, and the occasions of production may disclose a more finely differentiated plurality of meanings.

Mithila painting: aripan, women's creativity, and a living pictorial vocabulary

The essay connects the history of painting's movement from wall to paper and canvas with famine, the struggle for subsistence, and the market. This political-economic perspective is an important contribution. Yet it does not adequately explore how far women's own decision-making authority grew with the new income made possible by the dissemination of their skills, how commercial profits were distributed, or what role intermediaries played. To narrate commercialisation solely as decline would be as one-sided as presenting it solely as liberation. The essay opens the issue but leaves its final socioeconomic investigation to the reader.

The naming of Sita Devi, Baua Devi, Sarita, Ganga Devi, Mahasundari Devi, Godavari Dutt, Jamuna Devi, and other artists gives art history individual lives. Particularly worthy of attention is the account of Ganga Devi painting hospitals, trains, physicians, and scenes of medical treatment. If a tradition is structurally capable of assimilating changing experience, modern subjects need not entail its

destruction; they may instead constitute the recreation of a living tradition. The writer records both support for and opposition to such innovation, thereby preventing the essay from becoming a mere lament.

The account of Jamuna Devi teaching art without payment to students across caste boundaries is noteworthy. The literary significance of the episode is that artistic training becomes not simply the transmission of technique but a means of remaking social relations of status and respect. Nevertheless, the sequence of classifications—"Brahmin," "Kayastha," and "Harijan"—cannot be taken as a complete history of artists' actual participation. "Harijan" is a historical expression in the original text; "Dalit" is more appropriate in present critical discussion. An understanding of the contribution of artists across caste groups to Mithila painting requires moving beyond classificatory schemes to compare artists' own accounts, local traditions, and archival records.

A significant contradiction inheres in the writer's preservationist argument. How can one permanently identify a single "original form" of an art continually learned and altered in transmission from mother to daughter? Preserving traditional rhythms, symbolic knowledge, processes of making, and communal contexts is certainly appropriate; denying an artist the right to choose new subjects, however, would violate artistic autonomy. Preservation should therefore signify creative self-determination informed by inherited knowledge, not the immobility of a museum display.

An earlier English-language reference for Dr Mishra's thinking on painting is "Mithila Paintings: Women's Creativity Under Changing Perspectives." The description of this article, published in the December 2003 issue of the *Indian Folklore Research Journal*, likewise centres on women's creativity, the transition from floor and wall painting to canvas, livelihoods after famine, and the preservation of tradition. The thematic affinities are clear, but without comparing the full textual variants of both versions it would be improper to call the later Maithili work a verbatim translation of the earlier article.

3. Haflong: Workshop, Dialogue, and the Agency of Indigenous Women

"Haflong" is the most extensive travel narrative in the "Wanderings" section. At its beginning, a conversation with Dr Abhik Ghosh returns the writer to memories of the North Cachar Hills. This first-person method distinguishes the opening from a conventional geographical introduction. The gateway into observation is a friend's question, the writer's response, and the psychological movement of returning to memory.

The discussion of mass bamboo flowering, increased rodent populations, and food scarcity gives literary form to the relation between nature and livelihood. Scientific research also confirms that, in some bamboo species in northeastern India, seed availability following synchronous flowering has been linked with rodent outbreaks and crop loss. It is not possible, however, to infer that all bamboo species, places, and flowering events yield identical outcomes. The

original writer mentions an interval of fifty to sixty years; this should not be taken as a universal botanical law.

Haflong's central literary achievement is its sequence of workshop scenes. In questions and answers involving Dimasa, Karbi, and Zeme Naga women, culture ceases to be merely an object of research; people appear who reflect on their own communities, make decisions, and take initiative. A Dimasa woman's proposal for collective action to improve urban cleanliness shifts the emphasis from the writer's administratively centred remedies to civic initiative. A Karbi woman's question—if traditional clothing ought to be preserved, why does the organiser himself not wear it?—reverses the writer's claim to moral authority. Here the "researcher" becomes a learner.

Self-correction is the aesthetic centre of this episode. The writer admits his error. In a conventional travelogue the visitor goes on describing someone else's civilisation; here the community being described itself reviews the visitor's conduct. This dialogic reversal increases the text's credibility. A small incident translates the collection's larger idea of respect for folk knowledge into practice.

Haflong workshop: dialogue, community knowledge, and reciprocal inquiry

The accounts of Zeme Naga women's experiences, bridal adornment, and cultural organisation convey an awareness of local diversity. The narration of Rani Gaidinliu's struggle connects Indigenous history with the history of resistance to colonial rule in India. A Government of India Ministry of Tribal Affairs account records her birth in 1915, her participation in Jadonang's movement, imprisonment, release in 1947, and death on 17 February 1993, independently corroborating the principal historical outline of her life. Some biographical conversations in the original author's account, however, should be

read as oral tradition or dramatic reconstruction rather than direct quotations from archival records.

Some episodes concerning intercommunal relations and religious conversion in "Haflong" intensify the writer's personal response. It would be a critical error to turn these episodes into general judgments applicable to the entire Zeme Naga or Christian community. The text brings together accounts of political-religious organisations, the opinions of one or two individuals, and the writer's own agreement with them; these three levels must remain distinct. The critic's responsibility here is not to suppress ideological debate but to recognise the evidentiary limits of experience.

4. Vrindavan: The Emotional Ground of Devotion and the Discomforts of the Modern Town

In "Vrindavan: Of Feeling, Enjoyment, and Yoga," the journey begins less with an external landscape than with familial memory and emotion. Folk verses recited by the writer's maternal grandmother, his mother's devotional wish, the journey with his father, and memories of his mother-in-law's observances make Braj an intimate cultural geography even before it becomes a site of pilgrimage. The writer repeatedly returns to different moments in the journey's chronology: recollections of childhood, an institutional episode in 1997, a family visit in 2007, and a return in 2011 create a layered narrative.

Alongside Vrindavan's emotional world of devotion, the essay also contains the materiality of enjoyment and consumption: the *chappan bhog* offering of fifty-six foods, temple arrangements, meals, travel facilities, vehicles, riverfront steps, markets, and religious services. The words "of feeling" and "of enjoyment" in the title are not merely synonymous epithets; they denote the distinct dimensions of devotional experience and religious economy. "Of yoga" acquires its meaning through self-surrender, memory, and spiritual absorption, although it receives no separate systematic philosophical exposition.

The description of the Yamuna's foul-smelling water and the dirt on the riverfront steps is a significant reality in this travel writing. The collision between an idealised sacred geography and a polluted physical environment renders the scene poignant. The narrator interrogates the discourse of sanctity through what he has observed with his own eyes. The text thus avoids becoming unexamined devotion and instead documents an environmental discomfort arising within faith itself.

The spontaneous speech of a devotee of Radha and the songs in the local Braj dialect bring multilingualism into the text. To the Maithili narrator, Brajbhasha is not simply an "alien" language but an emotional companion. The writer's flexibility of idiom and fine observation of conversational situations turn the work into a memoir-like narrative rather than a practical guidebook to pilgrimage. The independent experiences of local priests, boatmen, women, or

ashram residents, however, are comparatively scarce; the text is constructed primarily through the eyes of the visiting family.

5. Lower Dibang Valley: The Difference Between the Title and the Actual Narrative Scope

The title "Lower Dibang Valley: The Extraordinary World of the Idu Mishmi Community" creates an expectation of an ethnographic account of a particular cultural community. The opening introduces Arunachal Pradesh's Indigenous diversity, the difficulty of reaching Roing, and the purpose of the journey. Most of the text available in the collection, however, concerns the ordeal of crossing the Brahmaputra, the life story of Ramotar, a boatman from Purnia, a vehicle stuck in mud, and incidents involving fellow travellers and hotel arrangements. Concrete, first-hand discussion of Idu Mishmi rituals, language, oral narratives, social organisation, or women's crafts does not receive the expected extent of attention.

This does not mean that the work lacks significance. On the contrary, the boatman's labour, migration from Mithilā, debt, landlessness, and earning a livelihood away from home emerge with remarkable vividness. The dialogue conducted in Maithili on the boat as soon as the speakers discover connections with Purnia and Madhubani is an excellent instance of the fleeting intimacy created by language in a foreign place. Beyond state boundaries, "our" language connects people within a social relationship. Ramotar's experiences of separation from home, family debt, and the recovery of stability through labour establish an intertextual link with the collection's reviews of Mandal.

An important narrative tension lies in the unequal distribution of attention among its characters. The writer responds at length to the conduct of Richa Negi, the driver Dharma, and his colleagues; wounded pride, fatigue, anger, and inner turmoil are disclosed openly. Such subjectivity makes the travel narrative vivid but pushes its declared purpose of community study into the background. Considered as a preliminary travel diary, its achievement is one thing; considered a complete study of the Idu Mishmi, it requires acknowledgment of the distance between the work's claim and the available evidence.

The district administration's cultural account of Lower Dibang Valley contains information on the Idu Mishmi community's Reh and Ke-meh-ha festivals, women's weaving skills, bamboo and cane crafts, and religious traditions. Such information makes visible one limitation of the original work: the inner life of the community named in its title receives comparatively little direct description. It would be unreasonable to present information from external records as though it were the writer's unpublished field experience.

6. Malik Bhai: The Force of Dialogue and the Limits of Opinion

"Malik Bhai's Wayside Reflections" differs from conventional descriptions of place. It combines a character portrait, an intimate reminiscence, and an

extended political conversation. The narrative arises from an acquaintance with Malik Bhai, their shared discussion of *nautanki* folk theatre, and conversations while walking near the Shri Ram Centre. The authorial voice, as listener, asks questions; Malik Bhai answers, and the sequence of response and counter-response moves from topic to topic. The "pavement" is not merely a location but a sign of informal public deliberation outside the formal lecture hall.

The text's interest derives from the individual's uninhibited manner of speaking. Communal coexistence, political parties, elections in Bihar, administrative corruption, and political developments in Gujarat are woven into the same conversation. In reading the work as literature, it is essential to distinguish a speaker's opinion from factual truth. The work offers no independent documentary corroboration for its sweeping allegations concerning particular political organisations, communities, or administrative groups. They remain the views of a character in dialogue as recorded by the author, not verified descriptions of collective conduct.

Compared with other pieces in the "Wanderings" sequence, the reasoning here is more digressive. The contrast between planned research on *nautanki* and an improvised conversation on the pavement is the work's literary pulse: an unplanned consciousness of society enters the space of planned research. But the writing becomes critically weak if it expects readers to assume that the speaker has special authority on every subject. For every occasion on which the narrator is impressed by Malik Bhai's explanations, readers should also retain an opportunity to ask questions and consider opposing evidence and alternative views.

As a literary achievement, this portrait testifies to the political language of its time; it should not be used as a definitive source of historical conclusions. Some statements generalise excessively about social groups; elsewhere, internal differences of opinion within communities disappear. Criticism must acknowledge the vitality of the spoken voice while examining its evidentiary incompleteness.

7. Nanda Raj Jat: Oral Tradition and the Cultural Geography of a Female Deity

"Uttarakhand's Nanda Raj Jat" begins with personal sadness. Remembering his village while in Delhi turns the writer towards the Himalaya. Its opening conveys an experiential truth: for someone living away from home, the mountains of another region can sometimes become a cultural refuge filling the absence of the native village. The writer gradually introduces several stories of Nanda Devi's birth, the *jagar* oral tradition, the figurative opposition between a goddess's natal and marital homes, and the social organisation of the pilgrimage.

Understanding *jāt* as a divine procession and comparing *jagar* with Mithilā's *aṣṭayām* devotional practice is a useful strategy of comparative folklore

interpretation. An unfamiliar custom is explained through a familiar cultural example. Nanda Devi's departure from her natal home, the devotion of local society, and metaphors of women's married lives occur together. One must also ask what meanings the goddess's suffering and separation acquire in relation to the actual experiences of women in society. The work raises this question but does not analyse it extensively.

The official account of the Garhwal Division confirms the roughly twelve-year cycle of Nanda Raj Jat, its departure from Nauti, the route towards Roopkund and Homkund, and its organisation over several days. The original essay records several folk beliefs together; these should not be assigned the same status as historical records. The authentic value of the piece lies in its vivid introduction to local beliefs, not in the provision of a complete pilgrimage history or systematic ethnography.

8. Sangaiprau: The Microhistory of a Village and the Remembrance of Ancestors

"Sangaiprau: A Legacy of Remembering Naga Ancestors" is an important field-based piece in the collection. Reaching a village in Manipur, the author discusses settlement, clan memory, ancestral names, accounts by traditional chiefs, religious conversion, handicrafts, livelihoods, and women's circumstances. The writer's first-person observations are joined by the speech of village elders and women such as Athena. Cultural description consequently unfolds within human relationships.

The work reports the numbers of houses belonging to six clans—Kamei 27, Palmei 9, Golmei 11, Gangmei 8, Maringmei 8, and Neumei 1—as oral or field information from a particular moment. Their sum is sixty-four households. These figures should be understood as information about the village recorded by the writer, not as a permanent census. Such micro-level detail is unusual in literary travel writing; supplemented with temporal context, source identification, and verification, it could provide valuable leads for research into regional history.

The discussion of Kabui or Rongmei identity, belief in Tingkao Ragwang, and the influence of Christianity presents religion as a changing social phenomenon. A simplified binary between "original tradition" and "foreign religion" must give way to attention to individual and collective choices. The writer is deeply concerned with preserving tradition, but the testimony of converts themselves is heard comparatively little. A balanced ethnographic account would require the first-person experiences of both sides.

Descriptions of Athena's home, women's work, the social injuries associated with alcohol consumption, and aspirations for training create a lived picture of the village. Praise of household cleanliness, flowers, greenery, textile crafts, and women's commitment to their duties is not simply picturesque; it expresses the material forms of everyday culture. Yet it is insufficient to locate women's

existence solely in traditional crafts. The author himself raises questions about their technical education, economic opportunities, and participation in decision-making; this gives the work greater social relevance.

The strength of the Sangaiprau account lies in its potential to balance respect for the past with recognition of present difficulties. It documents community memory, but it is not a comprehensive sociological survey. Its research value would increase if the short duration of the visit and the evidentiary standing of informal interviews and local testimony were specified.

9. *Gāmaka Jinagī* (*Village Life*): Reading Rural Society Through Stories

The review of Jagdish Prasad Mandal's *Gāmaka Jinagī* is a particularly revealing example of the collection's critical tendencies. Rather than stopping at general praise of the short-story collection, the reviewer discusses social meanings through such stories as "Bhainṭaka Lāvā," "Bisāṛh," "Pīrāraka Phaṛ," "Aneruā Beṭā," "Dūṭā Pāi," "Bonihārin Marnī," "Hāri–Jīt," "Ṭhelābalā," "Jīvikā," "Riksābalā," "Cūnawālī," "Ḍihaka Baṭabārā," "Bhaiyārī," "Bahīn," "Pachatābā," "Dr Hemant," "Bābī," and "Kāminī." The richness of the review lies in the breadth of these engagements with individual stories.

The episodes of "Bhainṭaka Lāvā" and "Bisāṛh" underline the importance of crisis management and women's practical intelligence in a society exposed to floods and drought. Knowledge in these narratives is seldom the monopoly of state officials or educated men; village women, labourers, and marginalised communities can become intellectual centres of responses to crisis. The reviewer appreciates this, an emphasis closely consonant with the earlier idea of "parallel literacy."

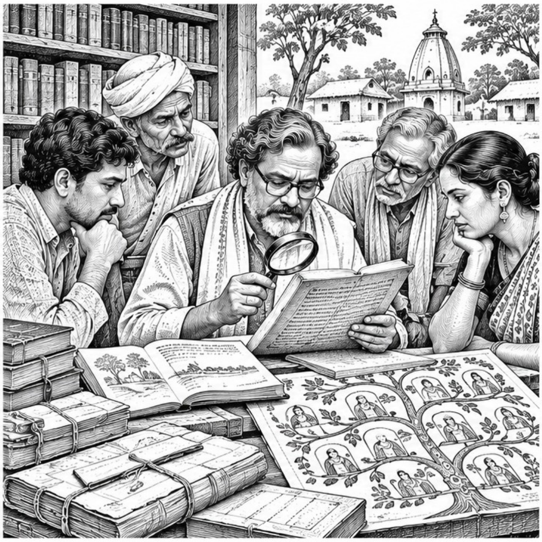
"Bonihārin Marnī" portrays women's arduous labour, economic insecurity, and moral resilience. Compassion produces a literary response here; yet the criticism would assume a wider social scope if it examined more explicitly the structural causes of labour exploitation—wage rates, land relations, and the power of contractors. The displacement of a potter's family in "Hāri–Jīt" makes Kosi erosion not merely a natural disaster but a crisis of hereditary craft and domestic life. The review affirms the dignity of skilled workmanship within folk society.

The interpretations of "Ṭhelābalā," "Dūṭā Pāi," "Pachatābā," and "Bhaiyārī" concentrate on migration to the city and the weakening of ties with the village. The writer does not reject the search for new livelihoods but sharply criticises the tendency to forget one's roots. This moral purpose has its limits: migration can result not from individual greed but from structural unemployment, poverty, or the absence of opportunity. Had the review given comparable weight to migrants' constraints, the village–city relationship would have appeared more complex and realistic.

Discussion of stories such as "Cūnawālī" preserves memories of disappearing folk occupations. "Ḍihaka Baṭabārā" presents a conflict between an educated character's greed and a rural sense of justice. "Bābī" recognises the value of social

intelligence beyond formal literacy; "Bahīn" measures kinship more by conduct than by birth. The reviewer's ability to identify the social threads in different stories is a strength, although the examination of literary form often recedes behind descriptions of moral messages.

Particularly noteworthy is the reviewer's attention to the naming of characters, rural similes, proverbs, and the cadence of sentences. Here he identifies not only subject matter but also the storyteller's linguistic instruments. Comparative examination of narrative perspective, temporal ordering, dialogue construction, contradictions within characters, and the openness of endings is, however, relatively limited. The review is consequently rich in social interpretation but partial as formal narratology. Recognising this limit does not diminish its importance, for it makes explicit the demand that Maithili rural fiction be acknowledged as a source of social knowledge.



Rural fiction and archival criticism: the text, its voices, and its evidence

10. *Jīvan Saṅgharṣa* (*The Struggle of Life*): A Collective Portrait of Mithilā Through Banspura

The review of the novel *Jīvan Saṅgharṣa* begins with the reviewer's own experience of reading. He writes that he ordinarily reads only a few pages at one sitting, whereas this novel compelled him to continue reading. Such disclosure of the reader's position matters in criticism: the judgment becomes a public account of experience rather than an impersonal command. Yet rigorous criteria of evaluation remain necessary after this confession.

The village of Banspura is the principal centre of the narrative. In the reviewer's discussion, episodes involving a newly married woman, an incident in the neighbouring village of Sisauni, collective outrage, and considered intervention

assume particular importance. The role of prudent villagers amid the possibility of violent revenge prevents the social narrative from becoming solely a tale of retaliation. Collective decision-making, leadership, and the sense of justice during social crisis constitute major fields of meaning in the novel.

The reviewer notes migration, the distribution of state assistance, widowhood, erosion by the Kosi, the potter's occupation, conflicts among villagers, and the choices available to workers. The idea of Banspura as a "miniature Mithilā" is an appealing critical formulation: many tendencies of a wider society converge within a restricted geographical space. But a single village does not automatically represent the "whole of Mithilā"; that is a critical metaphor, not a demographic finding.

The episode of Ramesara returning from Delhi to his village and starting a business brings the novel's economic imagination into view. Comparisons between wage labour in the city and potential village self-reliance, lists of tools, and experiences of employment lend the story the material specificity of a labour culture. Alongside these, references to the Dom occupation, the social punishment of Bhagata, and aid to a widowed woman reveal the intertwined relations of class, caste, customary rules, and moral justice within the community.

The reviewer's perspective is generally deeply sympathetic towards the novelist. This intimacy creates a valuable relation to the text, but reduces the proportion of negative scrutiny. Questions could have been raised about the possible overextension of the plot, characters' psychological development, the credibility of dialogue, women's perspectives, and latent configurations of social power. In particular, episodes where women's bodies become the locus of communal prestige in the name of honour must not be read apart from women's independent experience. Such critical caution would make it possible to understand the novel's literary significance more maturely.

II. Narrative Craft: The Many Forms of the "I"

One striking feature of the book is the narrator's shifting "I." In the painting essay, the "I" is a cultural interpreter; in Haflong, a workshop facilitator; in Vrindavan, a grandson, son, and accompanying family member; in Dibang, a tired, angry, or distressed traveller; in the Malik Bhai episode, a questioning listener; in Sangaiprau, a field researcher; and in the literary reviews, a conscientious reader. This plurality prevents the authorial voice from assuming the lifeless uniformity of impersonal academic exposition.

Sequential accounts of events and the use of dialogue bring travel writing close to fiction. The texts contain moments of anticipation, obstruction, discomfort, reproach, humour, and self-examination. Numerous events acquire dramatic tension—a vehicle trapped in mud, fears of rain while on a boat, a Karbi woman's question, polluted Yamuna water, or Malik Bhai's political remarks.

These are effective as literature because experience does not remain mere information: it takes on scenes, voices, and states of mind.

The intimacy of the narrator's voice can itself become a limitation. Extended accounts of personal resentment push the history of communities into the background. Sometimes the author's moral verdict arrives before a question is posed, giving readers little opportunity to hear the opposing case. This problem is particularly evident in the difference between title and subject in the Dibang account and in the conversations with Malik Bhai. Yet these inconsistencies also make the book useful to literary history, for they reveal both the authentic possibilities and the limits of modern Maithili first-person prose.

12. The Character of Maithili: Vernacular Speech, Multilingualism, and Editing

The collection's language has several layers. Alongside words for Mithilā's household objects, festivals, caste-linked occupations, and customary relationships appear English, Hindi, administrative terminology, and regional names. Words such as *bheṭ* (meeting), *gām* (village), *mon* (mind or feeling), *kaniyā* (bride or young wife), *aripan*, *sikki*, *jagar*, and terms associated with Naga traditions bring several cultural worlds into a single stream of prose. In such passages, the writer interprets one experience through another language without losing the local meaning of the words.

The writer's Maithili frequently creates a sense of spoken intimacy. Brief interrogative sentences, the cadence of conversation, wonder, anger, and familiarity are sources of its vitality. The published text sometimes displays unusual separation of conjunct letters, inconsistencies of vowel signs, irregular punctuation, and variant spellings. These should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of the author's linguistic incompetence: errors can also enter during publication and reprinting.

From the standpoint of linguistic consistency, forms such as "citrakalā/painting," "debār/dewāl," "canvas," "commercialisation," "Haflong," "Divang/Dibang," and "Zeme/Jeme" invite attention. A balance is necessary among local pronunciation, conventional forms of proper names, and standard literary Maithili. Yet it would be damaging to literature to destroy the rhythm of living speech and the naturalness of dialogue in the name of flat linguistic purism.

13. Women, Caste, and the Right to Create: An Intertextual Thread

Reading together the women painters of Mithilā, participants in the Haflong workshop, the mother and mother-in-law in Vrindavan, Athena of Sangaiprau, and Marni, Babi, and other women in Mandal's fiction offers a particularly productive approach to the book. Across these texts, women appear variously as guardians of memory, centres of the family, artisans, agents of political and civic intervention, and impoverished labourers. One must go beyond saying that

women "contribute" and examine who controls decisions, remuneration, status, and ownership of knowledge.

The market for Mithila painting raises a difficult question: if control of income passes into other hands as the value of folk craft increases, how real is the artist's independence? The Karbi woman in Haflong questions the researcher, reversing the power relationship of representation. In *Village Life*, the practical intelligence of people regarded as obscure or illiterate alters the perspective of literature. Within these different works, the same possibility opens up: people assumed to lack authority are themselves producers of knowledge.

The book's treatment of caste is not uniform. Painting is discussed through a sequence of caste groups entering the practice; *Village Life* and *The Struggle of Life* deal with labour, occupations close to the domain of untouchability, social prestige, and structures of rural power. Yet examination of the institutional causes of caste hierarchy frequently retreats behind moral ideals. Social harmony is an important aim, but criticism should not make the actual distribution of inequality invisible by speaking only of harmony.

14. Environment, Migration, and Livelihood: A Shared Narrative

The collection's diverse locations are linked by ecological crisis: famine and the new market for painting in Mithilā; bamboo flowering and food shortages in Haflong; crossing the Brahmaputra and remote livelihoods in Dibang; pollution of the Yamuna in Vrindavan; and erosion by the Kosi in "Hāri–Jīt" and *The Struggle of Life*. Read together, these examples make nature not "scenery" but an active force within the organisation of life.

In this respect the writer's approach is primarily experiential. He locates crises in the circumstances of persons and families, making them readily comprehensible to readers. What is absent, however, is quantitative study of disaster management, land rights, river policy, environmental regulation, or government systems. The collection is therefore more appropriately regarded as a document of social and environmental sensibility; it would be inappropriate to call it a complete scientific or policy-based study of the environment.

The question of migration is equally contradictory. In Dibang, a boatman who has moved away transforms his economic position through hard work; in *Village Life*, the glitter of the city severs people from their roots; in *The Struggle of Life*, a man who returns from the city and establishes a livelihood in the village offers an example of possibility. Comparing these three episodes shows that migration is neither invariably destructive nor automatically liberating. Its outcomes are shaped by the combined effects of debt, land, education, occupation, markets, family, and social acceptance.

15. Evidence, Partisanship, and the Limits of Research Method

The collection's greatest strength is its vivid examples: individual voices can be heard and the materiality of places felt. Yet literary authenticity and historical or

ethnographic authenticity are not identical. A report of a directly observed event constitutes one level of evidence; a legend heard from others a second; a political conversation a third; and a fact independently verified through external records a fourth. Placing all four in the same category would distort any assessment of the book.

First, some statements about Indigenous traditions derive from information supplied by one or two people. The informants' names, places, interview dates, and languages are not everywhere identified with equal clarity. Second, judgments favouring cultural preservation sometimes come close to prior religious or political convictions. Third, while supporting the autonomy of women in local communities, the writer often allows their voices to be heard chiefly through his own descriptions. Fourth, both reviews of rural literature are denser in praise than in the formal criticism of literary technique.

Discussing these limitations does not deny the book's achievements. On the contrary, reading the text according to the nature of its evidence makes its actual importance clearer. The travel narrative becomes an initial document of observation, not a complete ethnography. The literary review becomes critical evidence of the reviewer's social understanding, not a complete and final verdict on the story collection or novel. Respect for these distinctions is an indispensable condition of scholarly reading.

16. Corroboration from External Research and Questions Still Requiring Examination

With reference to Mithila painting, India's Geographical Indications registration record lists application no. 37 for Madhubani Paintings, an application date of 22 August 2005, and a certificate dated 16 May 2007. This provides an independent reference point for the art's institutional recognition. Registration alone, however, does not establish each artist's income or the actual effects of protective measures. Regional economic research is still required.

The concern about bamboo flowering expressed in "Haflong" is relevant to scientific studies, but differences among species and regions are essential. Principal dates in Rani Gaidinliu's struggle are corroborated by government sources. Official information records the roughly twelve-year recurrence and the route of Nanda Raj Jat. Details about Idu Mishmi crafts, religious traditions, and festivals are available in official Lower Dibang Valley sources—but it would be wrong to attribute material not described in the original essay to the original writer's fieldwork.

This study has established no independent archival conclusions concerning the political remarks in the "Malik Bhai" section. Those remarks have therefore been examined as forms of conversational style, social presupposition, and the political language of their time. Such a method avoids the unnecessary assertion of unverified facts while respecting the original piece's literary character.

17. A Place in Literary History: The Expansion of Folk Knowledge and an Unfinished Critical Project

The collection's contribution is particularly evident in three respects. First, it makes Maithili prose capable of cultural observation beyond the boundaries of Mithilā. Experiences in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Braj, and Uttarakhand are expressed in Maithili; the language studies unfamiliar worlds without surrendering its local intimacy. Second, it places the experience of ordinary people at the centre of culture and literature—women painters, boatmen, workers, traditional artisans, and thoughtful villagers. Third, it opens the possibility of dialogue between literary criticism and field experience.

The collection's critical incompleteness is inseparable from these contributions. A writer who advocates cultural diversity sometimes insists on preserving a single "original tradition"; an advocate of marginalised women's independence sometimes gives insufficient space to their own accounts; and a writer who praises the social wisdom of villages sometimes approaches the necessity of migration as though it were a moral failing. Rather than assembling these contradictions merely into a catalogue of defects, it would be more appropriate to regard them as a record of the struggles within modern Maithili intellectual prose.

The book's finest pages are those in which the writer moves beyond his settled assumptions and listens to another's voice. Through the Karbi woman's question, Ramotar's account of livelihood, Ganga Devi's new painting subjects, Athena's domestic world, and the uncelebrated workers in Mandal's fiction, Maithili prose extends the field of its experience. Its weaker moments occur when a political or cultural judgment exceeds the direct evidence. Genuine critical justice consists in seeing both conditions together.

Conclusion: Preserving by Questioning, Not Merely Preserving

The central substance of *Videha Maithili Prabandha–Nibandha–Samālocanā* lies in a cultural insistence: recognise folk life as a legitimate field of knowledge, and do not leave the creative experiences of ordinary people beyond the margins of scholarship. The signs made by women in Mithila painting, community memory in the northeast, the emotional geography of Braj, and the struggling society of Banspura give this insistence different forms. The book is not a wholly finished instance of a fully integrated theory; the intimacy of reminiscence, warmth of observation, moral commitment, and incompleteness of research are intertwined throughout.

The book's literary achievement is that it brings travel writing, the study of folk culture, and criticism of rural fiction in Maithili onto one shared ground of cultural questioning. Its principal limitations are uneven density of evidence, incomplete representation of the communities described, discrepancies between some chapter titles and their subjects, and a comparative excess of praise in its criticism. For readers who recognise both sides, the collection represents not the terminus of research but the beginning of numerous fruitful questions.

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Folk Life, Women's Voices, and the Test of Evidence

A Literary and Anthropological Critique of Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra's Prose and Poetry in Videha Sadeha 29

Introduction to the Text and the Basis of Criticism

Videha Sadeha 29: The Prose and Verse Writings of Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra (2022) is a multigeneric collection edited by Gajendra Thakur. Its compositions were collected from issues 1–350 of the *Videha* electronic journal. The volume brings together extended narratives designated as short stories, long stories, travel memoirs, examinations of folk traditions, essays on art and history, literary reviews, and, at the end, the poem "The Village's Ache" (*Gāmak Kacoṭ*). Rather than containing these writings within the frame of any single literary genre, it is more appropriate to read them through the reciprocal relations among narrative craft, folk knowledge, and social criticism.

The collection's central literary achievement is not merely the author's attempt to save Mithila's festivals, songs, and stories from oblivion. More particularly, he seeks to discern within that cultural world women's labour, love, anger, humiliation, public speech, and capacity to decide. Certain impediments nevertheless coexist with this perspective: an overwhelming attachment to folk belief; the occasionally unanticipated predominance of the male narrator's gaze; an indistinct boundary between historical conjecture and verified fact; and, in places, uneven editorial treatment of the language. The fundamental critical question, therefore, is this: how far can an intensive experience of folk life become literary knowledge, and at what point does it require a more rigorous discipline of evidence?

The Collection's Form and the Author's Creative Position

A Multigeneric Collection as the Extension of a Research Perspective

The contents place narratives such as "Paṇḍitāin," "Burirāj," "Candā," "Prakṛti Sundari and Cūhar Mistrī," "Sakhī Kuntī," "Men Cannot Be Trusted" (*Puruṣak Nahi Viśvāse*), and "Circumstances Made Her a Writer" (*Paristhiti Lekhikā*) alongside research essays such as "An Anthropological Examination of the State of Mind of Maithil Women Travelling with Folk Sayings," "The Arrangement of Food in Maithili Folk Songs," and "Madhushravani: A Festival of Folk Veda and Custom." Under the heading "Wanderings" (*Yāyāvarī*) appear experiences of the Northeast, Uttarakhand, and Braj; critical essays also address *Banait-Bigaṛait*, *Maithili Folk Tales*, *Village Life*, and *The Struggle of Life*. The reader thus encounters not separate authors, but changing expressions of one creative consciousness: when the storyteller describes folk song, he cannot entirely forgo

the desire to narrate; when the researcher tells a story, he supplies an extensive background of social class, occupation, belief, and inherited custom.

The advantage of this convergence is that the characters do not inhabit a vacuum. Their food, bodies, labour, property, marriages, devotion, and speech are interwoven. Its disadvantage is that the movement of the prose is not always controlled. In some narratives authorial explanation occupies more space than action; in certain analyses the force of personal recollection outweighs the discipline of research. Nevertheless, through this traffic among genres a coherent map of the author's preoccupations emerges.

The Author's Self-Positioning: From Hesitation about Writing in Maithili to Public Intervention

At the beginning of "North Cachar Hills: The Earth's Hidden Paradise," the author describes writing in English as a professional practice and acknowledges his hesitation about writing in Maithili. His account of contributing the "Wanderings" column to the magazine *Racanā*, and of his decision to publish travel narratives in *Videha*, is significant. This admission is not merely autobiographical: it contains a social history of the entry of specialist knowledge into the mother tongue. When the trained perspective of anthropology takes refuge in Maithili prose, complex cultural subjects emerge from the confines of a foreign academic language.

Yet "proximity to the people" is not in itself proof of impartiality. The author's familial upbringing, familiarity with Brahmanical ritual, Delhi's scholarly milieu, and travels through diverse cultural regions of the country are at once instruments and limitations of his vision. Here the authorial "I" converses with the reader as a trusted witness; his experience deserves respect, but not every interpretation constitutes a final judgment. To read the collection properly is to retain both the warmth of his experience and the need to interrogate it.

Society, Memory, and Narrative in the Fiction

"Paṇḍitāin": The Presence of a Life in a Woman's Absence

"Paṇḍitāin" begins with a death remembered over the telephone and an invitation to the annual death observance. Raghav's recollection enters the world of Jata and Anuradha, and the story expands across Bhola's impoverished Brahmin household, the Saurath marriage assembly, the marriage broker Niras Jha, child marriage, education, the ashram, imprisonment, a life devoted to ritual service, and Anuradha's death. Through this circular structure of beginning and end, the reader first experiences the absence of the dead woman and only afterwards learns the history of the circumstances of her life. The story's emotional thread is not simply Anuradha's service, but also her decision to stand beside Jata as a companion in adversity. Anuradha's and Satyavrat's support in the struggle to establish his innocence carries the narrative beyond domestic devotion towards the question of justice.

The social realism of this work is particularly acute. Brahmin status confers no economic security; in the marriage market the body, education, age, and property become decisive. Loans, debts, and brokerage are not incidental details but mechanisms governing the family's helplessness. Yet the title "Paṇḍitāin" identifies Anuradha in relation to her husband's occupation, while the narrator's description of her beauty repeatedly turns the woman into an object of masculine pleasure. The possibilities of Anuradha's courage and self-determination are more complex than this gaze permits. Presenting so extensive a life history under the designation "short story" also raises a generic question: this is not a story of one compressed moment but a long narrative approaching the novella. Its most enduring effect is left by the closing scene, in which Anuradha's voice survives in the memory of songs, bangles, and devotional singing.

"Burirāj": Scholarly Pretension and Institutional Opportunism

In "Burirāj," the episodes involving Raghav, Sohan, and Nirbhay unfold within the precincts of universities, research, employment, and cultural institutions. Nirbhay's outward bearing, social connections, promotions, and degrees increasingly become emblems of prestige, while the narrator questions the moral emptiness within. The final satire turns on the fact that institutional power can recognize the title "Doctor" but fails to scrutinize a person's character. The satire draws its force from the sequence of biographical incidents; the closeness between the university's outward civility and private self-interest makes the reader uneasy.

Here, as in other stories in the collection, Raghav serves as an author-like witness. This sustained recurrence constructs a shared fictional world, but critical caution is indispensable. The personal details furnished by the narrator are details situated within the truth of the fiction, not evidence of an independently established life. The story itself closes with a declaration that it is wholly fictional. With that qualification in view, its satire ought to be read as a literary criticism of power rather than as an accusation against a particular institution or real person.

"Candā": From the Playing Field to Violence over Property

"Candā" begins in the colours of adolescent Raghav's and Chanda's games, their mutual attraction, the village veranda, and growing familiarity. Into a world once animated by the bodily playfulness of kabaddi gradually enter family property, shares of inheritance, fraternal hostility, the devaluation of labour, and memories of violence. The conflict between Bulesar and Kanhaiya turns the story into an account of kinship politics. The tenderness of personal affection becomes powerless amid collective bitterness. Chanda's presence ensures that this history is not solely a description of men's quarrels; it also reveals the psychological effects of disintegrating relationships.

The writer generates movement through scene, dialogue, and recollection, although extended family histories repeatedly interrupt the narrative pace. Even

while the eponymous Chanda occupies the centre of the title, men command most of the instruments of decision in the story. This may be understood not merely as a literary deficiency but as a reproduction of the social order ostensibly being depicted. In the closing cremation scene, where the dead, the injured, and the shadows of conflict appear to Raghav all at once, unredressed injustice and guilt receive an intense symbolic form.

"Prakṛti Sundari and Cūhar Mistrī": Compassion, Tribal Setting, and Linguistic Prejudice

In this story, the forests and natural environment of Chotanagpur, the narrator's childhood, his closeness to local communities, the young woman Rajkumari, and the artisan Mangnu Mistri provide the material for a narrative of social insecurity. Amid illness, unequal relationships, and death, the narrator's compassion for Rajkumari runs deep. Nature, the body, and community are shown to be intertwined. But the critical reader must distinguish two levels: local beliefs as represented in the story and truth established medically or historically. The narrator's pronouncements about the transmission of disease should be understood as statements within the narrative; without medical records they cannot count as independent evidence.

Contrasting epithets such as "innocent tribal" and "base artisan" also expose established hierarchies within an apparently sympathetic discourse. To make the tribal community wholly guileless and the town or male character wholly corrupt is to risk simplifying reality. The more independently Rajkumari's voice and the community's response were allowed to emerge, the fuller the narrative would become. The author's compassion is a genuine source of literary energy here, but compassion cannot be regarded as the only sufficient condition of representation.

"Sakhī Kuntī" and "Men Cannot Be Trusted": Two Distinct Images of Women's Lives

"Sakhī Kuntī" is an unruly and intimate childhood recollection, ending in separation. In the narrator's eyes Kunti is not simply a woman he once knew, but a form of life transformed by the blows of time. At the story's conclusion, the desire to keep alive the Kunti of earlier memory rather than the frail Kunti of the present is psychologically moving. Yet it also raises a difficult question: is the preservation of an idealized image, instead of accepting a living woman's changed condition, a convenience for the narrator? It is precisely this unsettling question that makes the story poignant.

"Men Cannot Be Trusted" opens an extensive world of education, marriage, competition, ruptured relationships, and achievement among Ashutosh, Chandrakala, Saumya, and other characters. Although Chandrakala ultimately becomes a successful homemaker, mother, and teacher, she does not trust men. The paradox of the title is concentrated here: social standing and an orderly family life do not automatically restore trust to the mind. Yet the prolonged

sequence of events sometimes pushes the woman's inner experience into the background. The moral complexity expressed in the story's final sentence would have been more forceful if articulated through the woman's own direct voice.

"Circumstances Made Her a Writer": A Story within a Story and a Woman's Creative Self-Defence

"Circumstances Made Her a Writer" is one of the collection's most extensive narrative undertakings. Raghav visits the home of Professor Sudhakar in Darbhanga; the story gradually moves towards Nandita's life, her marital experiences, Ragini's suffering, the emergence of writing, and the struggle against social constraints. The moment when Nandita gains the opportunity to tell her own story marks an important narrative turning point. She ceases to be merely a character described by others and begins to present the narrative of her life herself. Memory, dialogue, embedded narrative, poetry, and the resumption of travel converge within the plot. The concluding proposition—that circumstances made Nandita a writer—renders creativity not a luxury but a means of resistance born of experience.

The limitations of this experiment are nevertheless plain. Nandita's autobiographical account is repeatedly governed by Raghav's responses and curiosity. The male listener assumes the position of an "authenticator" of women's experience. Descriptions of the body, the private circumstances of the household, and the expansion of emotional episodes sometimes unbalance the narrative composition. The Hindi poem quoted in the story serves as a dramatic vehicle for Ragini's suffering; the source does not clearly establish the identity of its independent author. It should therefore not be taken as definitive evidence of an external writer's authorship. Such a qualified reading does not diminish the significance of "Circumstances Made Her a Writer"; rather, it clarifies the tensions internal to its form and its conception of women's rights.

Folk Song, Women's Experience, and Ritual

Folk Sayings: Maithil Women's Experiences in the People's "Public Sphere"

"An Anthropological Examination of the State of Mind of Maithil Women Travelling with Folk Sayings" is a central essay in the collection. The author's initial proposition that Maithil women are the roots of Mithila's folk memory is elaborated through examples of songs, rites, proverbs, marriage, labour, and social prohibitions. Especially important is his contention that women denied access to public education nevertheless turn folk forms into places from which to comment upon their love, indignation, economic deprivation, and men's conduct. The folk saying here is not merely a "jewel of speech"; it is a compressed vehicle of satire, objection, and social psychology.

The essay's research strength lies in its attempt to connect numerous folk utterances to women's social conditions. In literary terms these brief statements collectively produce in the reader's mind an expansive choral voice. Yet the local

variation in these sayings, the age and caste of singers or speakers, the occasion and circumstances of performance, the dates of documentation, and information about alternative versions are not generally presented systematically. The reader can thus recognize the depth of the author's experience, but cannot readily determine where, or how widely, a particular saying circulates. The author himself describes the essay as no more than a few drops from an immense subject; that self-limitation implies both modesty and a programme for future research.

Women's public speech: folk song, sayings, and collective response

Sita: The Folk Voice of Resistance within Devotion

Read together, "Maithil Women's Reproach of Rama and Society: The Suffering of Mother Sita" and "Split Open, O Earth: The Suffering of Mother Sita" bring the collection's engagement with women's experience into sharper focus. The author acknowledges Mithila's devotion to Rama, but defends the folk tradition of reproach in relation to Sita's exile and the abandonment of a wife on the basis of public aspersion. A community questions the figure it worships; dissent need not end devotion but may enlarge the ethical relationship.

"Split Open, O Earth" is particularly affecting because the anguished utterance spoken by the author's mother connects the narrator's childhood curiosity to his later social understanding. Sita here ceases to be only an epic character and becomes a cultural language through which to express suffering in the face of injustice. Yet instead of arriving at the broad conclusion that all Maithil women experience this in the same manner, future research should examine experiences across communities, generations, and social positions. The author's achievement

is to make *maryādā*, or prescribed propriety, a matter for debate rather than a unilateral command.

Madhushravani: Folk and Vedic Traditions and the Question of Ritual Practice upon the Body

In “Madhushravani: A Festival of Folk Veda and Custom,” the author approaches the festival's stories, pictures, songs, plants, marital instruction, and women's participation as an integrated cultural school. The episode of Bihula and the elements of the rite constitute cultural wealth for reasons extending beyond religion: the occasion establishes relationships among listening to stories, telling them, making pictures, and a newly married woman's entry into a social world. The effort to read ritual and folk speech together displays acuity of observation.

Of special importance is the author's critical courage. He objects to the pain inflicted by the practice of burning or marking the newly married woman's knee, and proposes a symbolic alternative. The preservation of tradition need not entail leaving every practice untouched: this argument represents a developed form of the author's cultural outlook. “Gauri the Thief, Gauri the Witch, and Gauri the Wanton: The Contradictions of the Madhushravani Narrative?” further complicates this debate. These sharp social appellations within the goddess's story become a popular idiom for female jealousy, insecurity, marriage relations, and dissent. Finally, the author asks why the festival has not spread equally among all castes, touching upon the limits of inclusion. It is more important to keep the question open for investigation than to presume a definitive answer.

Madhushravani: intergenerational cultural knowledge and the practice of painting

Who Has the Right to Discuss Maithil Women? Representation and Responsibility

The essay bearing this title seeks to separate the right to write about women from any monopoly conferred by birth or gender. Referring to the arguments of women writers, his own field experiences with the Musahar community, and literary examples, the author maintains that sympathy and rigorous study can make responsible writing about others' experiences possible. The question is legitimate: why should recognition of the authority of those who have experienced suffering mean that the research of every other witness must be wholly forbidden? Yet the inverse assertion would also be inadequate: a sensitive writer's presence cannot simply replace a suffering community's opportunity to speak for itself.

The collection's writings themselves exemplify this dilemma. The author takes women's side in questions of their lives; occasionally, however, descriptions of their bodies, judgments upon their conduct, and representations of their social position remain constrained by the conventions of male narration. A stronger critical position would leave open the possibility of writing about women, Dalits, tribal people, or any community, while insisting that the voices of the communities themselves, critical scrutiny, accountability, and clarity of sources are indispensable. By this measure many of the author's essays are important beginnings, not final pronouncements.

Jog Songs: Love, Sexual Allusion, and the Cultural Role of Tantra

“The Influence of Love and Tantra in Maithili Jog Songs” interprets wedding songs not merely as a language for concealing embarrassment, but as a medium

of tryst, humour, the creation of relationships, and women's informal assertion of power. In the *jog* rite, the psychological intimacy of bride and groom, the double meanings of folk song, the symbolism of binding, and social play converge. Emphasizing the sense of *jog* as "joining," the author regards the song as an act of relation-making. This interpretation offers not a mockery of love but an account of the cultural preparation for married life.

Not every image associated with tantra should, however, be construed as evidence of an actual supernatural effect. These images belong to the songs' symbolic system and to the singers' beliefs. The meanings of folk song change with occasion, intonation, collective laughter, performers, and social restrictions. From this perspective, Richard Bauman's approach to oral art as "performance" offers a useful comparative instrument: the act of singing creates meaning beyond the written line. The author's discussion moves in this direction, but systematic records of actual performance contexts would have strengthened his argument.

The Parrot and the Crow: Not Merely Birds in Folk Song but Messengers in Relationships

In "The Parrot and Adornment," the parrot is a many-sided symbol of love, beauty, intelligence, remembrance, and intimate exchange. The author connects folk contexts, Sita's experiences, classical narrative, and Mithila's everyday forms of address. The essay's beauty resides in its multiplicity of symbols: the same bird can signify a lover, furnish a metaphor for a child, become a character in song, or recall the coexistence of nature and humankind. Anxiety that ecological crisis may bring about the loss of this symbolic world connects the essay with the present.

"The Crow as Messenger in Maithili Folk Songs" greatly enlarges this undertaking. The crow carries messages, mediates the speech of a woman separated from her beloved, and enters into folk beliefs and narrative traditions. The author draws examples from the *Panchatantra* to modern poetry. The wealth of this material yields cultural plurality; its limitation is that analysis of the original Maithili songs is sometimes overwhelmed by quotations in other languages and digressive contexts. Had the verses, the speaker, the recipient of the message, and the bird's function been presented separately, the transformations of the symbol would have been clearer.

"The Arrangement of Food in Maithili Folk Songs": From Food Lists to Social Organization

Food in Mithila is not described in this essay merely in terms of taste. Greens, fish, grains, curds, festive foods, kitchen work, and hospitality articulate social relations in folk songs. The author dwells in particular upon the invisible labour of the housewife. He brings into view the regular cooking, handicraft, management of ritual, child-rearing, and transmission of folk memory

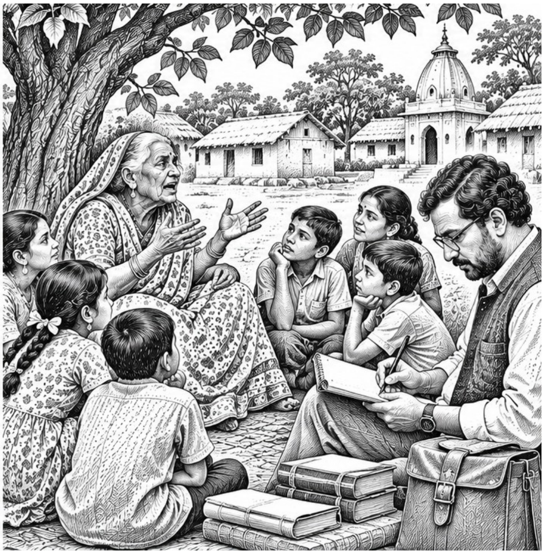
undertaken by women who say that they "do nothing." This is a sharp response to the characterization of women's labour as domestic inactivity.

The examination of food culture is cumulative and enumerative: lists of dishes and numerous proverbs lend archival importance to the text, while analysis of differences in class, caste, landholding, season, and access to food remains comparatively limited. Without distinguishing the platter of a wealthy household from that of a landless family, "Mithila's food" cannot be treated as uniform. Nevertheless the author's central proposition matters: recognizing women's countless unpaid skills as cultural capital is an initial step towards changing social evaluation.

The Memory of Oral Narrative: Grandmother, Bhartrihari, and Gopichand

In "The Nath Yogi Kings Bhartrihari and Gopichand in Maithili Folk Tradition," the author records a folk epic through his grandmother's remembered storytelling. Her voice and performance, intermittent songs, the child's enchantment as listener, and the passage of time within memory make this essay distinctive. The author's statement that whatever is good in his recollection belongs to his grandmother, while whatever wanders astray results from his own faulty memory, exhibits an exceptional ethical awareness towards the source. In oral tradition, knowers are not merely those who can read script: they are also performers, rememberers, and those who keep stories alive within the community.

Read through Richard Bauman's performance-centred approach, the grandmother's acting is not simply a manner of recounting a story but an act of creating meaning. The episodes of Guru Gorakhnath and Bhartrihari bring together the moral exemplarity of renunciation, the emotional world of folk song, and an imagination of worldly impermanence. Since the account depends on recollection, it is properly called one testimony to an authentic oral version, not the "sole" authoritative text of Bhartrihari and Gopichand. The author explicitly acknowledges this limitation.



Oral storytelling: grandmother, young listeners, and the act of documentation

Wanderings, Cultural Geography, and Direct Observation

Travel Narrative: Not Geography Alone, but an Encounter with Society

Across the two instalments on North Cachar Hills, the surroundings of Haflong, Dimasa communal memory, cultural heritage, and experiences of neglect by the mainstream are prominent. The author also records etymologies of place names heard from local people and presents more than one explanation; this willingness to acknowledge uncertainty is a positive feature. In his conversations with Dimasa women, concerns arise about alcohol, polygamy, and social organization. Travel writing thus moves beyond the pleasure of scenery towards social intervention. The author's assertion that a researcher arriving from outside should not merely teach but also learn from local experience constitutes an important cultural commitment of the collection.

"Lower Dibang Valley: The Unique World of the Idu Mishmi Tribe" records difficult routes, encounters with the community, and the limits of contact. "Sangai Prau" brings together Naga ancestral memory and communal enterprise; "Nanda Raj Jat," the collective movement of pilgrimage; and "Vrindavan: Of Feeling, Enjoyment, and Yoga," devotion, folk narrative, and the traveller's perspective. It would be inappropriate to judge all these writings by one standard: some foreground field observation, others spiritual memoir. To treat them all as factual field reports would violate the distinctions between the writer's experience and communal belief.

"Malik Bhai's Pavement Reflections": The Literary Use of Conversation

The centre of this travel piece is not the place visited but experiences of public life, politics, administration, and cultural institutions mediated by conversations with Murtaza Malik. The dialogic form allows the writer to register contemporary public opinion, doubts, and sharp satire. Malik Bhai's statements provoke the narrator's reflections, but do not thereby become independently verified historical facts. This distinction matters particularly when reading heated comments about administrators or political individuals. The essay remains lively through the pace of conversation; its difficulty is that, on numerous subjects, readers receive one party's observations and relatively little independently checked comparative material. It is better read as testimony to the contemporary intellectual atmosphere than as a definitive political history.

Folk Art, Social Reconsideration, and Criticism

Mithila Painting and Sāñjhī: Women's Pictorial Language

In "Mithila Painting: Past, Present, and Future," colour, murals, *kohbar*, religious occasions, and women's creativity form the principal threads. The author understands painting as a "script" through which women express their states of mind. This is an immensely fertile insight: a picture is not merely an object placed on paper, but an instrument of communication and a carrier of social memory. The author's fear that market pressures may erode an original aesthetic language raises an important question of preservation.

Yet it would be equally simplistic always to regard "original" and "transformed" art as enemies. New artists, Dalit communities, and women's choices of new subjects do not merely damage tradition; they also enlarge its domain of meaning. The National Crafts Museum's account and more recent art scholarship also reveal the plurality of contributions made by wall painting, *kohbar*, the market, and different social groups. Against this external frame, the author's love of painting is understandable, but a complete art history would require more diverse evidence. In "The Sāñjhī Folk Art of Mewar and Malwa," a comparison of *Sama-Chakeva* and *Sāñjhī* extends this inquiry. The daily acts of making new pictures, removing them, and making them again turn the image from a static object into a ritual situated in time.

Objections from within Social Tradition: Animal Sacrifice and Tobacco

The distinctive feature of "Reflections on Goat Sacrifice" is the author's declaration that although he accepts tradition, he does not consider himself obliged to accept violence and exploitation. His opposition to sacrifice at a public place of worship, proposals for alternative rites, disagreements within the family, and appeal for communal consent turn the essay from a manifesto into a record of inner struggle. Tradition and ethics are not fixed antagonists here: reform is conceived as possible from within tradition itself.

In "Tobacco's Destruction of Maithils and Maithili Culture," the author attacks the everyday normalization of addiction. The acceptance of tobacco, from household hospitality to public conduct, becomes a social concern. Readers should observe an essential distinction: the author's ethical insistence against addiction and specific medical claims about health require different kinds of evidence. The scientific verification of the latter is not systematically supplied through research references in the essay. As literary writing for social reform it is forceful; it should not be presented as a definitive certificate of public-health evidence.

Kailash as Critic: Social Standards for Reading Books

In his review of *Banait-Bigaṛait*, Subhashchandra Yadav's narrative language, lower-middle-class experience, rejection of hypocrisy, Kosi setting, and class-conditioned inhibitions particularly attract the author's attention. Reading Navin's humiliation in "That Girl," he connects linguistic usage to social psychology. In "Ramlochan Thakur's Maithili Folk Tales," he regards a story collection not simply as stories placed on paper, but as rewritings of an oral tradition; the recurrence of verse fragments and the role of characters possessing folk knowledge become prominent. The critic regards the stories as sources of social and cultural knowledge.

The discussions of Jagdish Prasad Mandal's *Gāmak Jinagī* and *Jīvan Saṅgharṣ* predominantly assess floods, employment, rural life, widows, labour, and local solutions. The author praises Mandal's problem-centred yet hopeful narrative vision. These reviews express a deeply felt commitment to the social usefulness of Maithili literature. At times, however, praise leaves too little space for rigorous consideration of possible formal weaknesses. The criticism would be richer if it attended equally closely to narrative structure, uses of voice, diversity of narrative language, the autonomy of characters, and departures from convention.

In the brief note titled "Rainbow Sky," the author recalls writing a foreword to Jagdish Prasad Mandal's poetry collection and acknowledges the distance between his anthropological training and poetic expression. It should not be mistaken for an independent, extended review of the poetry; it is an appreciative preface to Mandal's literary outlook.

"Rabindranath Thakur, His Writings, and the Indifference of the Public Mind" exposes a tension between the politics of literary recognition and popular memory. The author questions the comparatively limited institutional recognition accorded to the contributions of a popular lyricist. Along with literary evaluation, the role of cultural institutions becomes a principal subject of the article. Specific statements concerning awards, however, require checking against official documents; without direct records it would be improper to turn the author's allegation or impression into a historical conclusion.

Essays on Folk History: Belief, Place Names, and Historical Evidence

"Ravana and Mandodari's Wedding at Mandore in Rajasthan" brings together a travel destination, ruined architecture, folk narrative, and archaeological curiosity. The author asks how the secret stories contained in stone and public memory may be disclosed. This question has both literary and research significance. Yet local tradition alone cannot establish that an event belonging to the age of the *Ramayana* actually took place; the author's description furnishes no such proof. Folklore tells us how a society invests certain places with meaning; the chronology, location, and factual occurrence of historical events require independent inscriptions, archaeology, and contemporary records.

In "Similarities between Saurath's Somnath and Saurashtra's Somnath," place names, heritage, the Shiva linga, dreams, lineage history, and local information are frequently juxtaposed. The inclusion of Kumar Gagan's electronic letter at the end of the essay is a welcome archival feature, turning the text into a process of dialogue. But any proposed linguistic relationship between "Saurath" and "Saurashtra," or the identification of the site of Sita's *svayaṃvara*, requires sufficient linguistic and historical evidence before accepted folk narrative can be made into indisputable history. The author often exercises care with phrases such as "it is said" and "it may be"; the reader ought to preserve that same caution.

"Maharaja Pamheiba: Manipur's Garib Niwaz" introduces Manipur's political and cultural history and its popular memory. The author attempts to bring several opinions before the reader. Additional specialist sources would be needed to verify the dates, titles, and variant genealogies involved in the historical assertions. The essay's importance lies in acquainting Maithili readers with history beyond Mithila, not in providing the final resolution of every historiographical dispute.

Poetry, Narrative Technique, and Linguistic Analysis

"The Village's Ache": From an Inventory of Memory to the Irony of Modern Life

"The Village's Ache" is the sole poem in the verse section. Formally, it is a catalogue of feeling and a sequential invocation of folk memory: ponds, canals, flowers, the tulsi shrine in the courtyard, an earthen image of Mahadeva, games, gathering fallen mangoes, millet, fish, milk, *khirṣā*, birth songs, *samadāun*, *jog*, and songs of the seasons—image calls forth image. Its significance lies not merely in the number of rural objects named, but in the sensory extension of experience. The reader encounters an interwoven world of taste, smell, touch, sound, and household work. Village life becomes idealized precisely because it is being recalled through all the senses.

In the concluding passage, the comparison between a person suffering from diabetes amid the conveniences of the city and modern prosperity expresses a particular inability: even when everything is available, one cannot enjoy the taste

of it. The comparison is sharp, yet makes rural poverty, disease, caste division, and the severity of labour almost invisible. The poem's memory is selective—this can be both a generic property of lyric poetry and a critical limitation. Significantly, the inclusion of this single poem at the end of a large prose collection gives an emotional resonance to the preceding social analyses: the cultural world examined in the essays becomes an urgent appeal in the poem.

Narrative Craft: The Recurrence of Raghav, the Abundance of Dialogue, and the Circle of Time

A narrator, listener, or bearer of experience named "Raghav" repeatedly appears in many of the collection's stories. This recurrence creates meaningful connections among otherwise separate narratives. At times Raghav is an author-like observer, at others a friend or the listener to confidential accounts of women's lives. The movement in "Paṇḍitāin" from present to past and back to the present, and the rearrangement of embedded stories in "Circumstances Made Her a Writer," show the author's sustained interest in the temporal construction of narrative.

Yet this witness of observed events sometimes moves into the position of omniscience. Within the freedom of fiction, sweeping knowledge of women's minds, private dialogues occurring at a distance, and characters' mental decisions is possible; but when the language comes to resemble field research, the distinction between narrative and report grows blurred. This is not necessarily a defect in fiction, yet obscurity of generic designation can mislead the reader. The length and multigenerational development of many extended works published as "short stories" aggravate the problem. More careful generic classification in future editions would clarify the collection's literary map.

Language: The Energy of Speech, the Vitality of Vernacular Forms, and Editorial Inconsistency

The most effective portions of the author's Maithili prose are those where domestic conversation, folk vocabulary, and proverbs appear in their natural setting. The vocabulary of village life—*bhānas* (cooking), *paiñc* (borrowing), *baṃsabiṭṭī* (bamboo grove), *ḍyoṛhī* (entrance court), *kohbar* (marriage chamber), Saurath, *cipṛī*, *khiṛsā*, and *kaṃsār*—thickens the text with local experience. The inflections of obliqueness, satire, persuasion, and reproach in women's speech, which cannot readily be recovered through translation, are important resources of the original prose. The author's field experience prevents these words from remaining meaningless ornaments; they appear as parts of social action.

The limitations are also substantial. Within a single essay one encounters inconsistent written forms such as "saṃ" and "sã," "me" and "meṃ," "nahi" and "nai," or "kael" and "kel"; unnecessary words from Hindi and English; excessive or insufficient punctuation; and, in places, obvious typographical errors. Differences of linguistic construction are natural in writings published at different times, but standardization was to be expected at the stage of compiling

the collection. Refining the language does not mean depriving vernacular speech of life; it means thoughtfully regularizing sounds, case endings, pronouns, and forms of titles. Where literary criticism requires quotation of a primary text, its inconsistent spellings may themselves furnish evidence of textual variants and must sometimes be preserved. Critical prose, however, ought to maintain its own linguistic consistency.

The Test of Anthropological Method: The Distance between Observation and Evidence

It would be unjust to characterize this collection as no more than an essayist's sentimental declaration of love. The author visits numerous places, sometimes names narrators or informants, quotes lines from songs, records different interpretations of folk beliefs, and attempts to describe the social functions of rituals. Such material is valuable for sociocultural study. Clifford Geertz's concept of "thick description" insists that the meaning of cultural action cannot be understood apart from its social context; some of the author's successful passages approach this mode of attention. Richard Bauman's perspective on "verbal art as performance" likewise regards songs and tales not simply as written texts but as living social events.

Nevertheless, it is methodologically risky to infer a homogeneous "whole of Mithila" from the book. Clear details of the singer's place and region, occasion, caste, generation, original recording, contextual variations, consent, and procedures of translation are not always available. Nor is it consistently indicated how much of an essay derives from childhood recollection, how much from direct fieldwork, and how much from secondary sources. Thus even where a sensitive interpretation is persuasive, independent re-examination may be difficult. Research does not require experience to be abandoned; it requires an evidentiary chain to be shown alongside conclusions drawn from experience.

A Critical Examination of Source Attribution

The essay "The Crow as Messenger in Maithili Folk Songs" presents the English text "You start dying slowly" and its Maithili rendering under the name of Pablo Neruda; the essay also calls Neruda a poet of Spain. Neruda was, in fact, a Chilean poet. The work known by the title "A morte devagar" is originally attributed to the Brazilian writer Martha Medeiros; it circulated on the internet under Neruda's name. This error does not invalidate the collection's wider literary contribution, but it demonstrates how indispensable trustworthy author attribution and the examination of direct sources are in literary scholarship.

Conclusion

The true centre of this collection by Dr Kailash Kumar Mishra is not the glorification of "the folk," but a sustained dialogue with the contradictions of folk life. The author who values *kohbar*, Madhushravani, folk singing, and tradition also protests the practice of marking a bride's knee, public animal

sacrifice, tobacco use, and women's humiliation. Immersed as he is in rural recollection, travel also enables him to introduce Maithili readers to the cultural worlds of the Naga, Dimasa, and Idu Mishmi peoples, Malwa, and Mewar beyond Mithila. The storyteller who places women's suffering at the centre must also continually learn to free his prose from the prejudices of the male gaze. The book's worth ought to be recognized without concealing these tensions.

In literary terms, the most powerful writings are those in which a particular scene joins a social question: the mourning sound at the end of "Paṇḍitāin"; the cremation in "Candā"; the memory of "Sakhī Kuntī"; the moment of Nandita's autobiography; the mother's cry of "Split Open, O Earth"; the grandmother's Bhartrihari song; or the sensuous catalogue of village life in "The Village's Ache." From the standpoint of research, the most productive essays are those in which the author leaves a question open: the caste boundaries of Madhushravani, women's objections voiced through folk song, alternatives to violence within tradition, the preservation of folktales, and the historical contexts of place names.

Conversely, the book has three major limitations: needless extensiveness in some stories; uneven distinctions among field observation, recollection, folk belief, and verified fact; and inadequate editing and source identification in the collected texts. To identify these limitations is not to oppose the author's work, but to exercise responsibility towards its lasting significance. The collection belongs to that current of Maithili prose which brings literature, cultural anthropology, and criticism of public life into conversation with one another. It offers future researchers more useful questions than ready-made answers; and this interrogative quality is its enduring achievement.

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Part VII

Nit Naval: Rajdev Mandal

Ambarā: Folk Experience, Social Resistance, and Poetic Craft

The Kosi catastrophe, caste inequality, labour, women's experience, and environmental consciousness in contemporary Maithili poetry

Abstract

Rajdev Mandal's *Ambarā* (2010) is a collection of contemporary Maithili poetry in which the concrete circumstances of rural life are intertwined with ethical resistance, social inequality, caste humiliation, calamity, the struggle for existence, and the destruction of nature. Giving priority to close readings of the poems, this study evaluates the collection in relation to the historical background of the 2008 Kosi flood, environmental justice, a poetics of resistance, dialogism, and the organisation of symbols. Its central argument is that *Ambarā* achieves its greatest force where abstract moral instruction is transformed into a concrete scene, a contradiction, or the voice of someone who suffers. The multiple scenes of 'Bāṛhik Citra' ('Images of the Flood'), the compassionate yet political symbolism of 'Cīṛīk Jāti' ('The Bird's Caste'), the crisis of inter-caste marriage in 'Triśaṅku', and the conjunction of labour and poverty in 'Raṅgak Khoj' ('The Search for Colour') exemplify this tendency. At the same time, the study critically examines the collection's didactic endings, recurrent facile rhymes, unevenly developed symbols, and the limited opportunity granted to some women characters to narrate their own experience. Ultimately, the literary significance of *Ambarā* lies not merely in its declaration of social concern, but in the tension between success and failure in the process of giving that concern a sensuous form.

Keywords: Ambarā; Rajdev Mandal; contemporary Maithili poetry; Kosi flood; caste discourse; environmental justice; women's experience; vernacular speech; satire; poetic craft.

1. Introduction: The Social Ground of Poetry and the Questions of This Study

In criticism of Maithili poetry, the word 'folk' often becomes a synonym for some abstract cultural glory. Yet the realities of ordinary people's lives consist of more than songs, festivals, colours, or a sentimental memory of the soil. They also encompass insecure livelihoods, blows inflicted upon the body, administrative indifference, humiliation on grounds of caste, the division of families, and women's everyday struggles. Rajdev Mandal's *Ambarā* seeks to establish its poetic relationship with this difficult and uncomfortable world of ordinary people. The poet offers his reader not an idealised pastoral scene but a

succession of scenes involving a social order coming apart and individuals struggling against its disintegration.

The collection's first edition appeared in 2010. The author's brief autobiographical statement, 'Añjali Bhari Sāhitya Suman' ('A Handful of Literary Flowers'), places the work before the reader's judgment: rather than a long catalogue of personal achievements or self-congratulation, it foregrounds an invitation to scrutiny. In his introductory note, Gajendra Thakur emphasises the necessity of a linguistic and cultural foundation for Maithili poetry and of attention to local socioeconomic life. His emphatic value judgments should be understood as a contemporary critical commitment, not as an established factual ranking in literary history. The present study accordingly examines the collection's limitations independently alongside its strengths.

Five questions govern this inquiry. How does a poem give its social purpose an experiential form? What relation does it establish between a local event and a universal human concern? To what depth does it disclose inequalities of caste, gender, and labour? How does nature appear by turns as scenery, a living companion, and a structure under threat? And, finally, what kinds of poetic effects are produced by the collection's rhythm, metre, imagery, dialogue, and didactic assertions? These questions direct criticism towards the poems' structural coherence rather than declaring their excellence solely on the strength of subject matter.

2. Method of Reading: Close Reading, Social Context, and Critical Caution

The study draws upon all the poems in the collection, the author's autobiographical statement, and the preliminary critical foreword. Close reading brings the speaker, addressee, diction, sequence of scenes, metaphors, repetitions, sounds, satirical turns, and the function of the closing lines into relation with one another. A poem is neither a substitute for a historical report nor a set of data from a sociological survey; it is experience given poetic form. Nevertheless, the historical context of a specified event such as a flood can be checked against independent and reliable records.

In environmental criticism, Lawrence Buell considers the literary representation of nature, while Rob Nixon brings the less visible effects of environmental violence unfolding gradually to the centre of inquiry. These concepts are not simply imposed upon *Ambarā*. They are used to distinguish the spectacle of a sudden catastrophe from long-term social vulnerability. Likewise, Bakhtin's account of dialogism can illuminate the multiplicity of voices within the poems; it would nonetheless be a careless generalisation to call a poem fully 'polyphonic' merely because several characters speak in it.

In reading the treatment of caste, Ambedkar's intellectual insistence upon the annihilation of caste supplies a background, but it would be inappropriate to treat every afflicted character as representative of a particular caste without textual evidence. Similarly, the discussion of women's experience distinguishes a

woman's own utterance from the perspective of a male speaker. Such distinctions allow criticism to assess the responsibilities of the published work rather than infer what the poet must have intended.

3. Title, Structure, and the Range of Collected Experience

The title *Ambarā* suggests height and the expansiveness of the sky; yet the poems repeatedly bring the reader back to earth—to mud, sweat, bodies, hunger, blood, trees, rivers, offices, relief camps, and the confines of the household. This opposition invites a suggestive interpretation: the sky of aspiration can be sustained only upon ground where the value of human life is secure. Such an understanding of the title is, however, an interpretive proposition, not the poet's declared intention.

The collection opens with 'Āh' ('Ah!'), where the collision between compassion and the cry of 'vāh-vāh' ('bravo!') becomes a criticism of a society hungry for praise. The following 'Jñānak Jhaṇḍā' ('The Banner of Knowledge') explores the gap between proclamations of scientific triumph and the absence of a corresponding humane public consciousness. 'Jhāp̃al Astitva' ('Concealed Existence'), 'Rahab Ahā̃ Sabhak Saṅg' ('I Shall Remain with You All'), 'Nadīk Māch' ('The River Fish'), 'Bāṭ-Baṭohī' ('Road and Wayfarer'), and 'Sīmā Parak Jhūlā' ('A Swing at the Border') then question, in different ways, human freedom, collective strength, and an uncertain future. The sequence gives the collection not merely thematic variety but an initial intellectual orientation.

In the central portion, 'Hathiyārak Sabhā' ('Assembly of Weapons'), 'Ofisak Bhūt' ('The Office Ghost'), 'Mahattvākāṅkṣāk Gām' ('The Village of Ambition'), 'Rūsal Dhiyā' ('The Estranged Daughter'), 'Aṛhāi Hāthak Sā̃gi' ('A Two-and-a-Half-Cubit Share'), 'Ham Punaḥ Uṭhab Ekber' ('I Shall Rise Once More'), and 'Raṅgak Khoj' ('The Search for Colour') reveal different registers of actuality. In the latter portion, 'Parivārak Gāch' ('The Family Tree'), 'Triśaṅku', the two children's poems, 'Nehāi Par Lekhanī' ('The Pen upon the Anvil'), 'Gāchak Balidān' ('The Tree's Sacrifice'), 'Gāchak Hissā' ('A Share of the Tree'), 'Anhārak Khel' ('The Game of Darkness'), and 'Ā̃khik Pratīkṣā' ('The Eyes' Waiting') expand the collection's generic and emotional range. The final love poem reminds the reader that for this poet the human being is neither only an activist nor only a victim, but also a lover who waits.

This range is at once a strength and a challenge. Bringing terse social poems of two or four lines, extended narrative and dramatic compositions, and lyrical expressions of private love into a single collection breaks stylistic uniformity. At some points, however, the very disparity exposes the uneven development of the poet's voice: poems resting on an explicit moral conclusion and image-centred poems opening several possible meanings do not succeed to the same degree.

4. 'Bāṛhik Citra': The Kosi Deluge and the Poetic Form of Human Testimony

The substantial poem 'Bāṛhik Citra' ('Images of the Flood'), central to the collection, relates to the 2008 breach of the Kusaha–Kosi embankment. On 18

August 2008, a breach of the eastern Kosi embankment near Kusaha in Nepal brought extensive flooding to several districts of Bihar. This historical fact clarifies the poem's setting; it does not justify treating each scene represented in the poem as a separately documented occurrence. The poem's truth resides in its human and affective construction.

Rather than a linear plot, 'Bāṛhik Citra' composes six successive scenes. In the first, the breaking embankment, the Kosi's roar, the sweeping away of dwellings and lives and property, and the people's cries for rescue form a language of collective fear. In the second, the poignant conjunction of a mother's body and a two-year-old child destabilises the ordinary distinction between life and death. In the third, an elderly woman and her grandson stranded in a tree are encircled by danger on several levels: a torrent below, a snake above, and death on every side. This is more than a picture of a natural disaster; it is an emblematic scene of the rupture of life's fragile bonds.

In the fourth scene, the arrival of a 'predator' in the guise of a 'protector' beside the utterly vulnerable body of a surviving woman arouses the fear of another kind of violence. The poem thus raises an important ethical question: survival of the calamity does not automatically mean safety for a woman. In the fifth, the orphanhood and displacement of an eight-year-old girl, and her questions—where to go, where to live, what to eat—expose the inadequacy of the relief system through a child's voice. In the sixth, the sick infant, the sattu or roasted-grain meal, and the waiting for relief sharpen the distance between administrative language and hungry lives to an extraordinary degree.

The food crisis in the sixth scene requires especially attentive reading. *Sattu* is not simply an emblem of relief; it also becomes a measure of time, since the quantity of food left determines the prospects of survival. The official's questions and the affected woman's replies disclose two unequal linguistic worlds within the same event. At the end, a satirical conclusion along the lines of 'the government is measuring grief' exposes the difference between administrative quantification and the incalculability of human suffering. In this way, the poem moves from compassion to the question of governmental accountability.

The artistic achievement of the work rests chiefly upon the specificity of its scenes. As environmental criticism indicates, defining a disaster solely through the overwhelming spectacle of a single moment can obscure the inequalities that persist afterwards. In the final three scenes especially, 'Bāṛhik Citra' brings the continuing vulnerability of survivors into view. Yet some scenes accumulate overwhelming incidents with such relentless emotional intensity that a tension arises between the force of pathos and the credible distance needed for feeling. This limitation does not annul the work's social significance; it calls for critical evaluation of its mode of representation.

The Kosi flood: displacement, survival, and the unequal conditions of relief

5. River, Fish, and Tree: Nature's Embodiment and the Crisis of Life

Reading 'Nadīk Māch' ('The River Fish') together with 'Bāul Parak Māch' ('The Fish on the Sandbank') clarifies the tension within the collection's natural imagery. In the first poem, a fish leaps out of its familiar watery world in search of the world of air; the exhilaration of exploration draws it towards the possibility of a new life. Even repeated failures do not end its attempts. The river here is not simply confinement but at once security and limitation, while the fish embodies a life animated by the desire to risk the discovery of new knowledge.

In 'Bāul Parak Māch' the situation is reversed. Water is an indispensable condition of life for the fish floundering on sand. Its desperate movements are not a request for benevolence but the agony of a living creature forcibly displaced from its element. The two poems thus yield a subtle distinction: freely undertaken risk and violent displacement are not the same. The first fish leaves in search of an unfamiliar world; the second has been dragged out by the violence of a net. To describe both simply as 'metaphors of freedom' would therefore be a reductive reading.

In 'Gāchak Balidān' ('The Tree's Sacrifice'), the trees that impede a spreading fire emerge as a natural structure protecting human society. Two houses burn, but the trees save the entire village; the speaker demands that their contribution be acknowledged before God is thanked. The inversion holds the core of an environmental ethic: to attribute the work of visibly protective living beings to an invisible divine cause is to devalue experience. In 'Gāchak Hissā' ('A Share of the Tree'), the division of property extends even to the tree's branches. The

village council's intervention opposes the violent logic of ownership with the logic of interdependent life.

In 'Parivārak Gāch' ('The Family Tree'), a woman drenched in sweat carries a tree upon her head and identifies it with the family, education, and the growth of the next generation. The tree is not a metaphor for property but a living embodiment of the labour that nourishes the future. The conjunction of environment, household, and women's work takes the poet's environmental awareness beyond the picturesque. Read alongside Raymond Williams's critical account of country life, the poem demonstrates that nature is no ornamental background detached from social relations.

The collection's environmental consciousness does not take the form of a systematic scientific explanation; its idiom is one of immediate danger, popular experience, and moral appeal. Nonetheless, the poisoned earth of 'Bīkhak Ghail' ('A Vessel of Poison'), the threat to breathing in 'Ghātak Gandh' ('Deadly Odour'), and the failing energy of 'Mijhāit Dīyā' ('The Dying Lamp') suggest a more extensive deterioration of the structures that sustain life. It would be mistaken to interpret every image as a literal environmental occurrence, but together they make readers reconsider the relations between bodies, places, and livelihoods.

6. Caste, Humiliation, and the Changing Grammar of Resistance

The poem 'Jāti' ('Caste') is strikingly brief. The speaker attempts to introduce himself by giving his name, village, and occupation, yet the questioner asks again for his caste. The meaning of 'identity' suddenly shifts into the register of social hierarchy. The poem ends with the speaker's inward pain: rather than deliver a complete speech on humiliation, he leaves the reader with the discomfort of silence. Its beauty lies in this economy of statement. Instead of explaining suffering, it constructs the scene of suffering that remains unrecognised.

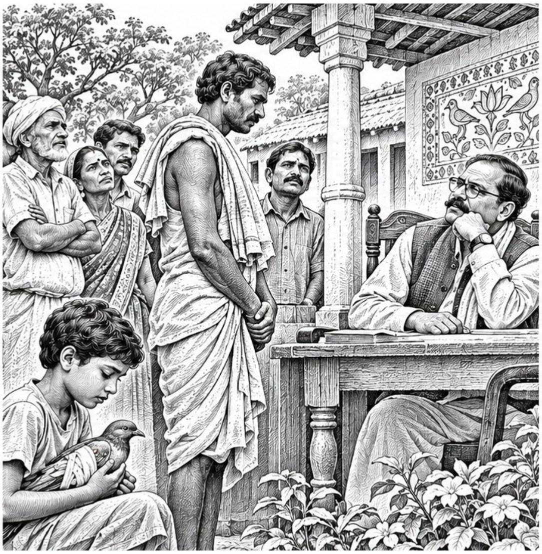
In 'Cīṛīk Jāti' ('The Bird's Caste'), an injured bird, an unfamiliar child, a hunter, and a weighing scale bring maternal care, violence, and the cruel politics of calculation into the same visual field. Although the child is not the bird's own, the bird embraces it through affection. The word 'caste' here moves among biological classification, a community founded on feeling, and the suggestion of social exclusion. Confining it to a single, definite caste identity would diminish its semantic richness. The apprehensive question at the close reverberates as fear for a collective existence.

In 'Ham Punaḥ Uṭhab Ekber' ('I Shall Rise Once More'), the figure of an infirm, neglected body marked as being of 'low birth' acquires a more overt social edge. The inversion in which even Yama and Dharmaraja experience revulsion or fear reveals the moral failure of entrenched authority: resistance by a body despised in life inspires fear even among the figures of death. The poem does not leave the

oppressed person a passive object of pity. The act of rising becomes the recovery of self-respect in the face of collective intimidation.

'Triśaṅku' carries this debate into the sphere of family and religion. A couple married across caste boundaries return to their village. The terrifying appearance of the husband's dead father in a dream, the anger of the family deity, threats of social expulsion, and the frightened husband's glance towards his wife combine into an interior drama. The poem's most powerful insight is that opposition to inter-caste love comes not only from the police or villagers outside, but also takes the form of patriarchal and cultural terror lodged within the self. The title, 'Triśaṅku', names an existence suspended between two worlds.

The collection's discourse on caste is nevertheless not equally incisive throughout. The silence of 'Jāti', the allegory of 'Cīṛīk Jāti', the devastating exclusion of 'I Shall Rise Once More', and the fear of 'Triśaṅku' proceed by different methods. In the light of Ambedkar's analysis of caste, it becomes clear that individual tolerance is insufficient: relations, marriage, dignity, and social structure must necessarily be central questions. *Ambarā* offers many scenes of these structural problems but develops its thought about collective organisation, property, and institutional transformation less fully.



Caste and recognition: the demand for a name beyond inherited hierarchy

7. Women, Love, Motherhood, and the Collision of Domestic Structures

In 'Rūsal Dhiyā' ('The Estranged Daughter'), a daughter who has returned from her husband's home is subjected to pressure in the name of 'shame' and family honour. Against the initial social sermon, she directly recounts the injuries of everyday life: her mother-in-law's reproaches, violence from her husband, her father-in-law's insensitivity, and the experience of a household resembling a

prison. The sentiment that 'life must first be saved; only then can the family's honour be preserved' is the ethical centre of the poetic utterance. The poem attacks the conventional value system that places a woman's life beneath family prestige.

In 'Paremak Adhikār' ('The Right to Love'), the woman character's speech criticises male cowardice and social pressure within a relationship. The question ceases to be merely how profound the lovers' emotions were; it becomes what ethical value a claim to love possesses when the courage to bear its social consequences is lacking. In 'Manovāñchit Cān' ('The Desired Moon') and 'Milan-Bichuṛan' ('Meeting and Parting'), tenderness and private sorrow predominate. These love poems restore the human intimacy sometimes forgotten in social debate, although conventional comparisons drawn from nature do not always produce original imagery.

'Muniyāk Cintā' ('Muniya's Worry') is an especially significant children's poem. While the household celebrates the birth of a son, little Muniya wonders who will now take her upon their lap and who will give her a mother's milk. Her voice creates dramatic comedy, but it would be wrong to dismiss it as mere teasing: the collective celebration of the son's arrival and the daughter's fear of receiving less attention are present in the same moment. The laughter at the poem's close leaves readers to consider for whom Muniya's anxiety is actually ridiculous.

The voice of the hard-working woman in 'Parivārak Gāch' depicts her not only as a provider of care but also as someone who plans the family's future resources of knowledge. The difference between her, the endangered woman in 'Bāṛhik Citra', and the daughter who resists in 'Rūsal Dhiyā' deserves attention. Yet in many poems women's roles remain enclosed within motherhood, marriage, or the family. Questions of women's economic independence, the multiplicity of their desires, and their authority in public decisions receive comparatively little consideration. The poet's good intentions and a character's full autonomy are not identical; criticism must remain alert to the distinction.

8. Labour, Poverty, the Body, and Social Visibility

In 'Raṅgak Khoj' ('The Search for Colour'), a needle pierces the hand of someone stitching torn clothing. The taste of blood, the colours of the rags, and the laughing gaze make deprivation an immediate bodily experience. The poem does not describe the protagonist's shame simply as a psychological weakness; it places that shame between poverty and social disparagement. The wish to make every patch the same colour becomes not merely a desire to mend clothing but an aspiration to transform the discriminatory gaze imposed upon humanity. Colour is here a complex symbol of class experience and social dignity.

In 'Badalait Bāṭ' ('The Changing Road'), images of present, past, and future appear in a mirror, but as the 'fire in the belly' intensifies, the speaker abandons self-examination and turns towards the kitchen in search of bread. Bodily

hunger establishes the priority of actuality over abstract philosophical contemplation. In 'Mahattvākāṅkṣāk Gām' ('The Village of Ambition'), a speaker invokes chariot, horse, whip, and finally his own shoulder yoked to the burden, creating an irony of labour undertaken for success. The violence of power and the limits of one's own toil collide in a single movement.

'Aṛhāi Hāthak Sāg̃i' ('A Two-and-a-Half-Cubit Share') depicts the recurrent division of property and domestic quarrels across generations. Accusations that the speaker once directed against his father return years later from his own son. Within this circular time, the reader encounters a satirical social rule: if personal suffering is not converted into understanding, it will recur unchanged in the next generation. In 'Ofisak Bhūt' ('The Office Ghost'), chairs and faces change but the distress of ordinary people persists; the continuity of institutional power becomes an object of satire through an almost folkloric symbol.

The poems of labour display a strong ethical optimism without providing a complete analysis of economic structures. One speaker expresses confidence that diligence, solidarity, or good intentions will remove obstacles. Such confidence can arouse communal energy, but it would be unjustified to conclude that the complexities of land, resources, wages, or inequalities in policy can be resolved by virtue alone. At times the poetry registers this distance; at others, it fills the gap with a rapid optimism.

Labour and dignity: the injured hand, the patched garment, and a daughter's attentive gaze

9. Satire against Power, Ethics, and Collective Resistance

In 'Hathiyārak Sabhā' ('Assembly of Weapons'), instruments of violence—stone, staff, and atomic bomb—compete in claiming greatness. The adjudicating assembly regards as superior that which can influence minds without shedding

blood; the final victor is the possibility of nonviolent thought. The device of seating weapons upon a human forum is more than a straightforward sermon: the personification of objects exposes the contradictions of a violent civilisation. Yet as the ending explicitly pronounces its moral, the image loses some of its openness.

In 'Bāṭ-Baṭohī' ('Road and Wayfarer'), an obstacle standing like a mountain yields to the collective force of the people. In 'Basātak Dhujinī' ('A Creature of the Wind'), an apparently helpless insect repeatedly trapped in a web finds the possibility of its destruction in the coming storm. In 'Sunagait Ciṅgī' ('The Smouldering Spark'), an ember buried in ashes dreams of challenging the bloodstained palace of power. In all three, release from despair comes not merely through individual goodwill but through the imagination of collective change. Yet the spark's fire may also assume the shape of new destruction; criticism should leave open the symbol's double-edged meaning.

In 'Anhārak Khel' ('The Game of Darkness'), a site of public entertainment becomes a platform for political speeches; promises replace rations while the audience's bodies turn skeletal with hunger. The contrast between political rhetoric and material need gives the poem the capacity for sharp satire. In 'Hit-Ahit' ('Benefit and Harm'), an old man's doctrine of isolated self-interest is challenged by the interdependent risks that become evident when a neighbour's house catches fire. Ethics here is not a sermon on good conduct but a practical understanding of the relations that sustain life.

In 'Baghanakhā' ('Tiger Claws'), a speaker who sees deception everywhere finally wonders whether his own eyes have become tiger claws. This self-directed question is one of the collection's more mature moments of satire. When comprehensive criticism of social failings turns upon the critic's own gaze, poetry escapes the posture of propaganda. In 'Lāj' ('Shame') and 'Nācak Bikhād' ('The Disquiet of Dance'), too, images of self-exposure connect social hypocrisy with the contradictions of the speaker's own position.

10. Vernacular Speech, Dialogue, Sound, and Experiments in Craft

The language of *Ambarā* moves between formal literary diction and the living speech of everyday Maithili. Forms of address such as 'he rau', 'kiyau bhāy', 'jāu', and 'āb', exchanges between characters, the expansion of proverbial meanings, and the names of ordinary objects bring a dialogic energy into the poetry. To relate this to Bakhtin's literary account of dialogism is not to claim that the collection reproduces the polyvocality of the novel; it is to recognise that meaning emerges between the competing idioms and values voiced by its characters.

Onomatopoeia is among the poet's principal devices: sounds such as 'saṭ-saṭ-saṭāk', 'dhaṛ-dhaṛ-dhaṛāk', 'jhan-jhanāk', and 'kaṭ-kaṭ' heighten tension and momentum. In 'Bāṛhik Citra', rapid movement, pauses, and cues that introduce successive scenes create an experience akin to staged drama. In 'Sir Vihūn Dhaṛ'

('The Headless Trunk'), an impossible bodily spectacle amid familiar wedding customs produces a composite effect of popular humour, terror, and social satire. The visual quality of these works reveals dramatic possibilities distinct from ordinary free verse.

Elsewhere the poet relies more heavily on short lines, end-rhyme, and repeated sounds. A short line alone does not constitute modernity; poetic distinctiveness arises from the condensation of meaning within images, unexpected associations, and the organisation of sound. In 'Āh', the phonetic resemblance between 'āh' and 'vāh-vāh' sets compassion sharply against social insensitivity. In some poems, however, the continual pursuit of successive rhymes fails to advance the thought and merely reiterates an assertion. At such moments, verse approaches the condition of an essayistic remark or a moral maxim.

The silent witness resembling a shadow in 'Ekṭā Cuppī' ('A Silence'), the apparition of one's own shadow in 'Kuhesak Pardā' ('The Veil of Mist'), the dead tradition weighing upon the living body in 'Kāḍh Parak Murdā' ('The Corpse on the Shoulder'), and the resolve to transform a pen into a spade in 'Nehāi Par Lekhanī' ('The Pen upon the Anvil') open new possibilities for symbolism. The last poem in particular questions the distance between literary activity and social labour. Placing the pen upon the anvil can be read not merely as abandoning writing, but as a severe desire to transform one's instrument of work.

II. Science, Superstition, and the Ambivalence of Modernity

'Jñānak Jhaṇḍā' ('The Banner of Knowledge') celebrates discovery, science, and the waning of superstition, but its final question brings to light the shortage of a corresponding humane public consciousness. If technological success remains separated from the ethical refinement of life, the victory of science remains incomplete. The poet seeks not blind imitation of modernity but its human-centred usefulness. In 'Jhāpal Astitva' ('Concealed Existence'), knowledge and inward conflict appear not as opposites but as participants in the difficult relationship through which self-recognition is achieved.

In 'Kaṭhuāel Rūp' ('The Wooden Form'), a character disappointed by the inactivity of an object of worship smashes it; the scene may readily become a symbol of opposition to superstition. Yet a straightforward scientistic conclusion should not be imposed upon it, since the poem also stages an inward drama of belief in an idol, expectation, retaliation, and fear. In 'Triśaṅku', dread of the family deity returns in the form of a dream. The contrast makes clear that mythic belief in the poet's world is not simply an external 'false idea'; it is also an instrument of social memory and emotional control.

The central tension in the collection's understanding of modernity is this: demands for reason, science, new paths, and a new society persist, while inward fears, familial conditioning, economic dependence, and the complexities of institutions of power obstruct their realisation. Poems that embody these

collisions in scenes and characters prove more enduring; poems that merely proclaim victory remain comparatively flat.

12. Children's Poetry and the Political Significance of Education across Generations

'Muniyāk Cintā' ('Muniya's Worry') and 'Kathīk Gāch' ('What Kind of Tree?') are separately identified as children's poems in the collection. In the first, a little girl's personal question unsettles the family's gendered mode of celebration. In the second, the fifth child's pretence to knowledge, his actual ignorance, and a friend's direct reply distinguish understanding from conceit. Both poems present the child not as a passive listener but as someone who asks questions.

Didacticism in children's poetry is not in itself a fault. The real test is whether instruction arises from within experience or remains an injunction imposed from outside. In 'Muniyāk Cintā', the child's voice is more powerful than instruction because her apprehension is recognisably human and dramatic. In 'Kathīk Gāch', the explicit moral formula at the end clarifies the lesson but somewhat reduces the reader's opportunity to arrive at an independent meaning. The collection's wider poetic problem can be seen in miniature in this contrast.

13. Poetic Limitations: Sermonising, Repetition, and the Premature Closure of Meaning

In evaluating the collection, it is easy to treat its social commitment as a sufficient virtue; yet moral rectitude and aesthetic accomplishment are different tests. Many poems end with definite proclamations of a 'new dawn', 'victory', 'success', 'unity', 'good deeds', or 'the right path'. Where a scene has already exposed a complex ethical dilemma, such a conclusive ending diminishes the reader's range of thought. The decision pronounced in 'Hathiyārak Sabhā' and the village council in 'Gāchak Hissā' exemplify the tendency. By contrast, the unanswered humiliation in 'Jāti' and the speaker's self-questioning in 'Baghanakhā' remain at work in the mind for longer.

A second limitation is the uneven development of symbols. Tree, shadow, fire, ghost, river, fish, blood, and darkness acquire considerable power in numerous places, yet at times a single symbol bears such a burden of moral significance that its living visual presence diminishes. The resistant energy of 'Sunagait Ciṅgī' also suggests the danger of destructive fire, a problem the poem does not explicitly confront. 'Mijhāit Dīyā' ('The Dying Lamp') holds together the triumph of darkness and the hope of dawn, but the inward process by which one condition passes into the other remains abbreviated.

A third limitation concerns the full independence of women's experience. 'Rūsal Dhiyā' places a woman's utterance at the ethical centre, but in some poems her existence remains restricted to the identities of beloved, mother, wife, or provider for the family. Similarly, despite the energy of the attack upon caste, the institutional methods by which society might change are not developed

extensively in many poems. Raising such critical questions is not to weaken the poetry's commitment; it is to demand greater artistic depth from that very social concern.

A fourth limitation pertains to the consistency of metre and rhythm. Easy rhyming drawn from speech sometimes enhances accessibility to a popular audience, but where the same kinds of rhyme and line ending recur in both long poems and short emotional lyrics, the freshness of verbal tension is diminished. Free verse does not require the abolition of rhyme; rather, it requires the shaping of rhythm according to poetic necessity. In this respect, the scene-based movement of 'Bāṛhik Citra' and the phonetic reversal in 'Āh' are more successful instances of the book's poetic craft.

14. The Maithili Literary Context and the Collection's Distinctive Place

It would be difficult to locate *Ambarā* with excessive confidence within a single linear account of Maithili modernity. The emphasis placed by its contemporary foreword upon the public crisis of poetic language, Mithila's economic and cultural foundations, and the indispensability of local experience certainly supplies an important critical context. The assessment of a single collection, however, cannot establish a ranking of all contemporary Maithili poetry. The emphatic praise of the foreword must therefore be kept at a critical distance from the poems' actual accomplishments.

Studies of Maithili's linguistic history demonstrate the complexity of relations among language, script, print, and social prestige. Questions about caste and print culture raised in recent scholarship cannot mechanically be applied to *Ambarā*, but the larger perspective is useful in examining the conjunction of linguistic identity and social humiliation in 'Jāti', 'Māy' ('Mother'), and 'Triśaṅku'. In particular, the collection's insistence upon receiving the many-layered voices of ordinary lives, rather than making Maithili merely a cultural emblem of the privileged, becomes one of its original ethical strengths.

Determining Rajdev Mandal's place in literary history would require comparative study of his other collections, contemporary poets, and the reception of the time. A single available collection cannot substantiate claims about the entirety of his artistic development or about any definite 'first' position. Nevertheless, within *Ambarā*, the multi-scene presentation of the Kosi flood, the inner drama of inter-caste marriage, the brief scenes of caste humiliation, the embodied language of labour, and the demand for environmental justice through the figure of the tree together create a distinctive field of social and aesthetic feeling.

15. Conclusion: The Credibility of Feeling and the Literary Value of Resistance

The central achievement of Rajdev Mandal's *Ambarā* is that society's neglected moments become legitimate subjects of poetry: being unheard, being asked one's

caste, enduring violence within the household, going hungry while awaiting relief, bleeding while stitching torn clothes, and living under the threat of a tree's destruction. The collection's social ethics is more powerful when it encounters a vulnerable body, a concrete object, or a tangled relationship than when it remains an external homily.

'Bāṛhik Citra' moves beyond pity to demand responsibility; 'Cīṛīk Jāti' formulates questions of belonging and the right to survive; 'Jāti' exposes the cruel limits of social identification within a small scene; 'Triśaṅku' reveals the terror exercised by caste within the intimacy of love; 'Raṅgak Khoj' joins the desire for dignity to the wounds of a labouring body; and 'Gāchak Balidān' demands recognition for the natural world that visibly protects life. These works do not simply replicate one another: they offer different formal responses to distinct experiences of social life.

Critically considered, the collection is by no means uniformly powerful. Moral certainty, recurrent rhyme, direct oratory, and uneven craft repeatedly restrict the extension of meaning. Yet amid these limitations, whenever the poems make the silence of humiliation, a child's anxiety, the terror of a wounded bird, or the hunger of flood survivors an immediately felt experience, their literary worth becomes independent of any concluding slogan. *Ambarā* should therefore be read not merely as an instance of socially committed poetry, but as a representative collection in which social concern and poetic form remain in continual struggle. It is this struggle that gives the work its enduring critical relevance.

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Vasundharā: Earth, Body, and Resistance

A Sociocritical, Ecological, and Poetic Study of Rajdev Mandal's Vasundharā

Abstract

Rajdev Mandal's *Vasundharā* is a collection of modern Maithili poetry in which the earth is not simply an element of natural beauty but the common ground of livelihood, rights, exploitation, love, and resistance. The central argument of the present study is that the collection's representations of peasant life, displacement, the invisible labour of workers, communal violence against women, and moral self-examination do not remain separate subjects: they become interrelated social experiences. On the basis of close readings of "Famine," "The Disabled Labourer," "The Tree Being Felled," "The Seed," "Violation," "Behind the Procession," and the seven-part "Dolnī the Witch," the study examines the poems' narrative organisation, speaking positions, dialogue, imagery, repetition, and rhythms of vernacular speech. Existing research on ecocriticism, subaltern representation, and gendered violence is used as a means of comparative analysis, not as proof of the poet's professed intellectual influences. The study shows that the collection is most accomplished when its ideological commitments become concrete events and the voices of characters; its weaker moments occur when a predetermined moral lesson constricts the multiple meanings available to poetic imagery. Both the literary significance and the critical challenge of *Vasundharā* lie within this tension.

Keywords: Rajdev Mandal; *Vasundharā*; Maithili poetry; peasants; labour; accusations of witchcraft; women's identity; environmental justice; vernacular language; collective responsibility.

1. Introduction: The Name of the Earth, the Question of Humanity

At first sight the title *Vasundharā* directs the reader towards the motherland, the green earth, and life-sustaining nature. Yet, as soon as one enters the collection, an uncomfortable reality attaches itself to this affective metaphor of the earth: seeds are withering in the fields; debt weighs upon the cultivator; a worker who built a house is insulted and turned away from its door; and a woman is compelled to leave her own village in the name of collective fear. The poet does not render landscape as a neutral prospect. He searches for the meaning of the earth within human bodies, relationships, and livelihoods. The collection's principal poetic question therefore takes shape: on the earth that nourishes everyone, whose rights, whose labour, and whose voice are made audible?

To describe the collection as merely "progressive," merely "nature-centred," or merely "subjective" would diminish its many-layered experience. The poet's voice becomes, by turns, the collective "we" of peasants, the solitary plea of an injured worker, the protest of an oppressed woman, the confession of a self entrapped in its own wrongdoing, and the symbol of a lamp struggling against

darkness. Because of these changes in voice, the centre of questioning remains stable while its ethical answers do not assume a single form. This study constructs an interpretation of the poems by reading together their organisation of events, language, rhythmic movement, and internal contradictions.

The distinction between an idyllic conception of the village and the actual conflicts of labour has long been important to literary representations of rural life. In his cultural study of country–city relations, Raymond Williams criticises the tendency to imagine rural life as a static and innocent past. In *Vasundharā*, too, nature and tradition are not inherently benign: the field is a place both of nourishment and deprivation, while the village can be the site of communal intimacy as well as cruel exclusion. This parallel establishes an interpretive relationship; it does not furnish grounds for attributing a direct influence of Williams upon the poet.

2. The Collection's Context of Composition and Structural Diversity

The collection's first edition was published in 2013 by Shruti Prakashan, Delhi. The brief account of the poet lists the earlier poetry collection *Ambarā* (2010) and the novel *Hamar Ṭol* (2013). In the opening statement entitled "A Few Words," the poet calls his writing an unceasing "exploration": the destination is not fixed; the journey continues; and an encounter with the reader is received in the modest spirit of offering a flower. This declaration of artistic purpose provides a useful key to the uncertainty, questioning, self-correction, and desire to move forward that recur in many poems.

The collection does not follow a uniform arrangement. The relatively expansive social poem "Famine"; brief reflective poems such as "The Eyes of the House," "Hands," and "The Voice of the Heart"; the extended satire "The Battle of Moustaches"; the seven-part narrative "Dolnī the Witch"; the nine-part "Pages from a Diary"; and the brief song-fragments of "Listen a Moment" all coexist. The poet is thus not confined to a settled "lyrical" posture. His principal resources of rhythm, however, are generally end-rhyme, repetition, and the momentum of colloquial speech; elaborate metrical discipline does not appear to be his primary concern.

The opening dedication addresses those who, despite being disregarded, remain devoted to the discipline of their work. Its significance is not merely one of emotional homage. Reading "The Disabled Labourer," "Famine," and "Hail the Farmer" makes clear that "work" is central to the often unseen making of society within this poetic world. The semantic dialogue between the dedication and these poems establishes the collection's ethical foundation.

3. "Famine": Hunger, Water, and the Unequal Politics of Development

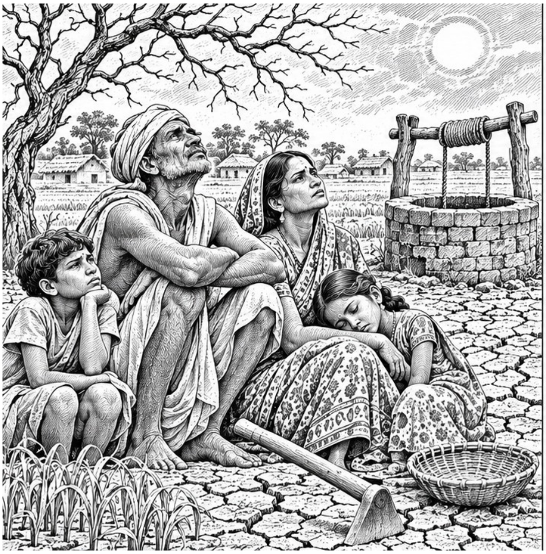
"Famine" is one of the collection's early, extended poems. It does not treat famine simply as a divinely ordained catastrophe caused by the failure of rain. Withered seed, cracked earth, cattle searching for grass, exposed fields, old debts, expensive grain, and anxieties about children's education and marriage: each

scene adds another social dimension to famine. Rather than offer meteorological information, the poem makes meaning from a human crisis. The figure of "demonic famine" gives the disaster a visible form; yet the reader sees, beyond the demon, the failures of practical institutions.

Three layers of crisis are present simultaneously in the cultivator's predicament: a natural shortage of water; institutional difficulties in production and the market; and fear of migration arising from the crisis. The cultivator is crushed by debt; the seed for the next crop is being destroyed; questions of grain prices, irrigation, markets, and storage disrupt the planning of a life. The labourer travelling away from home faces the prospect of illness, poor food and accommodation, and insecure earnings. The sequence shows that, although the suffering of famine begins in a paddy field, it spreads into the home, education, and the body itself.

The poem links water scarcity to human acts of cutting down trees and demands that the government arrange water management, tube wells, and remedies involving streams and rivers. Environmental responsibility and administrative accountability thus form a shared framework. Yet to confine the solution to water scarcity to the construction of embankments would be inadequate. The multidimensional crisis disclosed by the poem itself also contains questions of social justice in water planning, maintenance, and distribution. This limitation should be understood not as an objection imposed from outside the poem but as a critical possibility arising within it.

Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" offers a useful theoretical reference for understanding ecological damage and its long-term consequences for the poor. In "Famine," violence is not a single day's event: debt, lost seed, interrupted education, and insecurity about the future extend its duration. Nevertheless, the poem's local particulars should not be reduced to illustrations of Nixon's argument. The agricultural vocabulary of a particular region constitutes a system of knowledge in its own right.



Famine: a threatened harvest, dwindling water, and the uncertainty of rural livelihoods

4. "The Disabled Labourer": The Completed Building and the Dispossessed Builder

In "The Disabled Labourer," a worker comes to see the seven-storey building on which he had laboured. After an accident during construction, the amputation of one of his legs saved his life; his brother died. Even so, the worker retains pride in what he helped to build. The gatekeeper rebukes him from a place reserved for the proprietor's privileges. This narrative situation generates the full ethical tension of the poem: the worker has no property rights in the building, yet the authentic history of its construction is inscribed upon his body.

Self-respect and helplessness coexist in the worker's testimony. He repudiates insinuations of begging, theft, or dishonesty and offers his labour as proof of who he is. The gatekeeper's voice is not merely an individual expression of cruelty; it is the linguistic form of a class structure. The command, in effect, that "this place is for distinguished people" raises a wall between labour and consumption. The wall is not made of bricks but of identity and the right of entry. The poem asks the reader who deserves to be called "distinguished": the owner of the building, its guard, or the person who gave part of his body to erect it?

The poem's artistic success derives not from exhortation but from visual reversal. The labourer stands before the height he created while being relegated to the lowest station in society. The upward line of the seven-storey building and the helpless body of the wounded worker form a piercing counter-image. In the end, his silence intimates a voice capable of travelling far. The poem does not invent a

successful narrative of obtaining justice; it leaves behind the reverberation of humiliation.

The disabled labourer: the maker excluded from the building he helped to construct

5. Seed, Tree, and Earth: The Ethical Presence of Living Nature

In "The Seed," the poet treats a seed not as inert matter but as a centre of life oriented towards the future. Soil, water, air, and light are conditions of its growth; the possibility of a tree is hidden within it. What distinguishes this image is its sequence of causation: from minute seed to shoot, from shoot to tree, from tree to life-giving air and expanding life. In the poet's view, the significance of a small thing resides not in its present size but in the breadth of its relationships. Nature, while furnishing human benefit, therefore appears endowed with its own immanent activity.

In "The Tree Being Felled," the situation is reversed. The tree is granted the right to speak: it asks the human being why it has been condemned to death in return for its service, fruit, flowers, and sustenance. Personification here is not merely an ornament of style; it becomes testimony on behalf of nature in a court of justice. The tree names its own actions "benefaction" and human conduct "exploitation." The poet translates environmental destruction into the language of moral inequality. If "The Seed" embodies the hope of life, "The Tree Being Felled" presents the premature murder of that hope.

"Salutation" is an expression of gratitude towards the earth. The title and mode of address employ a religious-cultural idiom of thanksgiving; in other parts of the collection, however, the earth also appears as an unforgiving material condition. To overlook this duality and read the collection solely as praise of "Mother Earth" would destroy its fundamental tension. The cracked earth of

"Famine" and the flower-bearing *Vasundharā* of "Salutation" are not opposites: they are two conditions of the same dependence upon life.

Lawrence Buell emphasises the social and cultural meanings of literary imaginings of nature. From this perspective, the natural imagery of "The Seed," "Falling Drops," "Spreading Branches," and "Salutation" reveals weather, vegetation, and memory forming a shared field of significance. A limitation is also apparent: at times a universal appeal to love nature makes concrete ecological relationships appear comparatively simple.

6. "The Pet Pigeon": The Frightening Convergence of Human Affection and Consumption

"The Pet Pigeon" begins with an affectionate account of a domesticated pigeon becoming a member of the household. Feeding, familiarity, perching upon heads and hands, and play with children create a world of intimacy. But when the wish for meat arises in the course of entertaining a guest, the cherished bird is killed. The concluding event exposes the inequality in relations between nature and humankind: what had been nurtured becomes an object to be eaten. The violence is not an accidental departure from domestic life but a continuation of its utilitarian logic.

To regard this work simply as an argument for vegetarianism would diminish its literary irony. When the poem sets domestic affection and hospitality against violence within the same household, the reader confronts inconsistencies in everyday morality. In "The Tree Being Felled," kindness is repaid by punishment; in "The Pet Pigeon," nurture is repaid by slaughter. Together the poems interrogate the self-centred morality of human beings.

7. "Dolnī the Witch": A Seven-Part Narrative Journey from Rumour to Resistance

"Dolnī the Witch" is the collection's longest and, from the standpoint of structure, one of its most significant verse narratives. Seven successive parts trace the family tragedy of a woman named Dolnī, the social stigma imposed on her, the violent part played by the village council, and the eventual development of her resistance. Here the "witch" is not an established supernatural being but an accusation constructed within the collective imagination of the village. The story begins with the whispering of women cutting grass. The rumour becomes "truth" not through evidence but through the collective exchange of fear. In this opening, instead of preaching directly, the narrator shows how an accusation comes into being.

In the first part, the grass-cutters combine fragments of Dolnī's solitary movements, the deserted midday hour, and the memory of her dead child to arrive at a conclusion. Before the actual history of her grief can be heard, her conduct is taken as a sign of sorcery. In the second part, the story spreads: different voices add their own embellishments, and the word "investigation"

becomes the formality of a predetermined verdict rather than a procedure grounded in fact. The village elders' demand for severe punishment invests the accusation with the authority of a social institution.

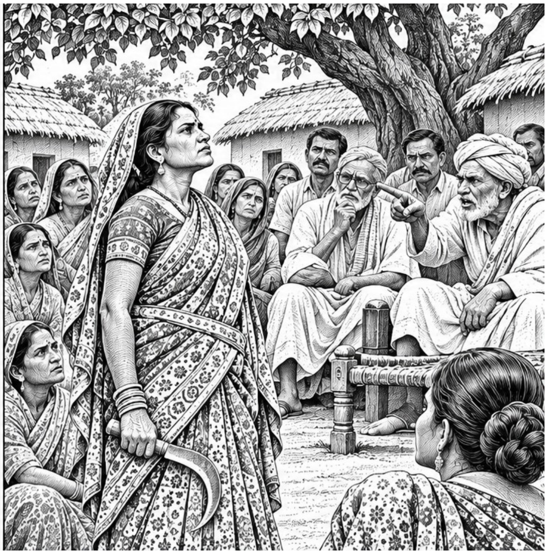
The third part supplies the social background: the deaths of Dolnī's parents-in-law, the disintegration of the family, quarrels, her husband's illness, and the burden of unremitting labour. The villagers interpret a weary woman talking to herself as evidence that she is a "witch." The passage is poignant because ordinary experiences such as exhaustion, solitude, and grief become markers of a woman's guilt. Dolnī's human vulnerability is transformed into fuel for communal fear.

In the fourth part, the death of a son born after a long wait, and the mother's desire to see him for the last time, deepen the narrative. Those carrying away the child's body will not heed Dolnī's plea; the image of a mother looking through a broken window signals the exclusion of living motherhood from social judgment. A mother's suffering seems to be the narrative's central evidence, yet the community cannot listen to it. This unheard voice becomes the key to the story's subsequent development.

In the fifth part, the accusation becomes deadly after another child's death. The facts of illness and failed treatment are submerged beneath the crowd's thirst for vengeance. A man named Phankā accuses Dolnī of murder and threatens to kill her; instead of correcting the failure of reason, the village council gives violence an institutional voice. At the moment of a collective decree, dissent becomes feeble. In this sequence the "village" is no longer merely a geographical unit but an ungoverned public opinion capable of violence.

The sixth part is especially important because Dolnī explains her actions in her own words for the first time. She had taken out her dead son's body to see him once again, dressed and looked upon him, and then buried him anew. Her own account of these actions overturns the entire structure of rumour. What the villagers had treated as evidence of sorcery was an act born of unbearable maternal bereavement. Her husband's wavering trust, followed by his decision to flee with her, places the crisis of trust within marriage alongside the possibility of human solidarity.

In the seventh part, new dangers confront the fleeing couple. The sickle in Dolnī's hand, initially a working implement with which she cut grass, becomes at the end a symbol of self-defence. This transformation of the image is profoundly significant: an instrument of labour becomes an instrument of resistance. Dolnī recognises the injustice of a male-dominated society and vows to protect her own existence. The final scene does not announce complete safety or the attainment of justice; it opens the possibility of another narrative. The ethical truth of the work resides in this incompletion: resistance is the beginning of a struggle, not the automatic reform of a social order.



Dolnī the Witch: a woman's voice and the sickle transformed from labour into resistance

The narrative of "Dolnī the Witch" develops first through collective talk, then through the formalisation of accusation, and finally through the testimony of the injured woman herself. The sequence may be read as a question: "Whose speech is admitted as evidence?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's debate on the representation of subaltern women offers a fruitful dialogue with this text: the woman speaks, but society does not consider her speech credible. Dolnī's concluding protest challenges this unequal order of listening. The theoretical parallel does not establish direct influence upon the poet.

Studies of witchcraft accusations in India show that illness, misfortune, conflicts over property, patriarchal control, and communal exclusion can be important elements in such cases. The process represented in "Dolnī the Witch," in which illness and death are turned into evidence for revenge, is comparable with this broader body of research. The poem, however, supplies no definite information about Dolnī's caste, landownership, or legal outcome; to insert such conclusions about this particular character would exceed the limits of the text.

8. "Violation" and "A Real Man": Violence upon the Body and the Irony of Masculinity

In "Violation," the social process following an assault stands at the centre. The village council, punishment, fines, and the police station are all present as institutions; yet the survivor is terrified by the prospect of having to recount the violence committed against her again and again before others. The poem does not deny the necessity of legal justice. It shows, rather, that justice performed before the public, without sensitive attention to the survivor's experience, can itself become another form of suffering. Fear of repeated testimony, the burden

of shame, and helplessness before a crowd examine social procedure from a woman's perspective.

Although very brief, "A Real Man" produces serious satire. A man who refuses to admit his fault in a domestic dispute and roars with anger takes pride in his violent posture as proof of being a "man." The concluding utterance is not a celebration of his self-description; it opens the possibility of a contrary, self-mocking reading. What society might praise as courage, the poet presents as lack of restraint, anger, and the evasion of responsibility. "Violation" and "A Real Man" thus expose two distinct institutional forms of violence against women: the insensitivity of public hearings and authoritarian masculinity within the home.

Where "Dolnī the Witch" provides an extended structure in which a woman eventually acquires the opportunity to speak, "Violation" condenses a survivor's distress into a few lines. Despite their different lengths, both poems pose a common question: does collective morality listen to women's experiences, or does it impose its predetermined judgments upon them? This is the most coherent thread of the collection's sensitivity to women.

9. Family, Property, and the Moral Distance between Generations

In "Reproach," a person afflicted by famine asks his brother for assistance and receives neglect and taunts in return. References to "father's granary" and to rights over one's own share make the family not only an emotional institution but also a site where resources are distributed. In times of social crisis, the old language of kinship may survive even while becoming empty in matters of food and rights. The famine here afflicts not only the field but the relationship between brothers.

"Aspiration" begins with an elderly person's wish: his sons are now grown, have assumed the responsibilities of the household, and he may at last lead a peaceful life. Yet the grandson's words reveal property disputes, family self-interest, and the old man's vulnerability. Within the expectation of seasonal change, a threat to the father's very existence begins to gather. The poem is especially effective because a child's speech discloses a disturbing truth: his simple words give the old man's future an unbearable political significance.

In these two works, the central concern is not a fixed moral division between women and men or between old and young, but a crisis of human conduct formed around property and resources. Within the family, the language of sympathy may become severed from the actual exchange of entitlements: this is an important critical proposition in the collection's representation of domestic reality. Bina Agarwal's study of the relationship between land rights and social position in rural South Asia helps illuminate the wider background of such family struggles over resources; it would nevertheless be improper to invent undisclosed details about the property rights of characters in particular poems.

10. "Behind the Procession": The Crowd's Crime and Moral Complicity

"Behind the Procession" is a distinctive political and ethical poem. The image of a crowd with thousands of arms and legs but only a single "head" sharply condenses the disappearance of individual judgment. People taking part in the procession turn one person's sign of dissent into a violent crime; after a killing, the crowd proceeds without stopping. The gulf between the rhetoric of revolutionary proclamation and the actual conduct of the crowd is thereby exposed.

The poem's first-person speaker considers himself merely someone following at the rear of the procession; ultimately, however, he does not claim exemption from its crime. His question to himself—if I am part of the crowd, why should I not also bear a share of its guilt?—raises the collection's ethical complexity to a higher plane. An honest political poem does not merely blame an enemy: it also questions the speaker's own presence. Here the poet does not celebrate the word "revolution"; he shows the consequences of collectivity without discernment.

"The Song of the Nation" calls for collective unity, freedom, and the country's advancement; "Behind the Procession" reveals the violent possibilities of collectivity. The coexistence of these contrary works produces an important intellectual tension within the collection. Unity becomes an ethical value only when it does not abolish individual responsibility. From this standpoint, "Behind the Procession" is a poem of internal vigilance against the uncritical acceptance of national feeling or popular struggle.

11. The Village Council, Leaders, and the Satire of Public Life

In "The Battle of Moustaches," a minor emblem of prestige becomes the basis of needless conflict. Moustaches vary in size, colour, and style, yet the conceit of social honour remains much the same. As a consequence, the homes, families, and livelihoods of the opposing sides are placed in jeopardy. Comic enumeration and the repeated utterance of "moustache" finally become a satire of society's self-destruction. The symbol's association with village prestige also turns it into a miniature of political self-interest.

In "There Will Be a Vanguard," a group is initially scattered and then forms a unity centred upon a leader; ultimately, that leader himself is caught in the snare of greed. The poem marks the unstable relationship between popular hope and the failure of leadership. In "The Human Deity," after a person is made into a god, his human weaknesses become visible, but the inclination of worshippers does not readily disappear. Both poems make the cult of personality an object of criticism: holding someone to be extraordinary makes it difficult to demand an account of actual conduct.

In "Father's Staff," an inherited walking-stick becomes a token of social dominance and old authority. A friend's dialogue insists upon equal rights and the need for a new path. Changing standards between generations thus appear as intellectual conflict. The elders in "Dolnī the Witch," the leader in "There Will

Be a Vanguard," and the inheritance in "Father's Staff" all lead the poems to ask about the source of legitimacy: does tradition, office, or the power of the people, by itself, make a decision just?

12. Poems of Self-Criticism: "The Cheat," "Theft," "Honesty," and "Knowledge of Lies"

The ethical vision of *Vasundharā* is not founded solely upon blaming others. In "The Cheat," the speaker admits his own fraudulent behaviour and comes to understand the pain of others only when he himself is cheated. This gives importance to self-knowledge acquired through experience: where instruction had not reached, injury does. The poem's posture of self-accusation displaces social criticism from its one-sided position of preaching.

In "Theft," someone who has become a thief acquires respectability after a while, while the clamour of guilt continues within. "Honesty" satirises the market price of a moral value, the disparity between urban and rural reputations, and the social esteem accorded to dishonesty. In "Knowledge of Lies," a father instructs his child in opportunism; that education returns to confront the father himself. Across the three works, corruption becomes not merely a bad habit of individuals but a contagious tendency that transforms social relationships.

Read together, these poems reveal a tension. Sometimes the poet constructs clear oppositions between the honest and the immoral, light and darkness; at other times the confession "I too" unsettles these divisions. The latter approach is more effective because it obliges the reader to confront the discomfort of his or her own ethical position.

13. "Pages from a Diary": A Sequence of Self-Expression, Power, and Self-Reform

The nine-part "Pages from a Diary" is not an extended linear plot. Rather, it is a succession of brief observations recording changes in states of mind. On the first page, the palace and the clinking of money stand in opposition to peace. The second page expresses the need for evidence when supporting a claim to truth; the third, ownership of one's own history and failures; and the fourth, the necessity of self-reform. When these sections are read together, the word "one's own" continually acquires fresh meanings: one's money, the truth of one's side, one's history, and one's mistakes.

On the fifth page, the speaker who defeats everyone is defeated by himself. On the sixth, the "chair" becomes a burden embedded in the body's back: one cannot stand upright without removing it. A symbol of political office and an indication of mental enslavement unite in a single image. On the seventh page, one finds one's best friend within oneself. The sequence thus becomes a journey from outward victory to self-defeat, from power and position to the desire for freedom, and towards the possibility of inward dialogue.

The eighth page shows a moment when someone who believes himself fearless becomes gripped by fear; the ninth becomes a song of a communal flower garden, fragrances from different flowers, and coexistence. In this conclusion, solitary self-criticism opens towards collective life. Yet the sections do not all possess equal artistic density: some are rich in incident and scene, while others become predictable ethical maxims. For all this unevenness, the sequence remains an important creative document of the collection's self-examination.

14. Figures of Conscience: River, Shadow, Darkness, and Mirror

In "Two Currents," a journey is obstructed because opposed currents within the mind cannot become one. The river serves here not as an actual flow of water but as a metaphor for inward doubt. In "Practice," a person trapped in deep water understands the absence of prior preparation; in "The Swimmer," the test of genuine swimming skill arrives with danger. Across these three poems, water is a combined symbol of psychological uncertainty and practical courage.

In "The Form of the Shadow," someone fleeing his own shadow finally understands that the shadow cannot be separated from the body. In "The True Form," fear arises before a mirror: seeing oneself evokes a wish to escape from oneself. In "The Turning of the Mind," the violent fantasy arises of cutting through inner attachments with the mind's sword. In these works the poet turns away from an external villain to make images of inward fear, rejection, and a divided self. At this level, *Vasundharā*'s social concern is no longer separable from self-concern.

The opposition between darkness and light recurs in "A Lamp upon the Edge," "A Garment of Light," and "The Door of the Mind." The lamp burns its own body to show the way; a lamp sheltered beneath the end of a sari awakens a new radiance in another; opening the closed shutters of the mind becomes the first condition of dialogue. Light, though a familiar emblem of religious exhortation, here also indicates the ethical work of social communication and opposition to inequality. Particularly noteworthy is "A Lamp upon the Edge" and its imagining of a world that does not discriminate by colour, appearance, or caste.

15. Love, Waiting, and the Mnemonics of Voice

Amid the socially centred poems, "The Eyes of the House," "Endless Waiting," "Music before Song," and "The Mark of a Voice" establish a more intimate emotional terrain. In "The Eyes of the House," an absent person inhabits memory so completely that a question arises about the merging of outward vision and inward image. Through the decoration of house and threshold, the sixteen traditional adornments, and broken sleep, "Endless Waiting" renders the duration of expectation as bodily experience. The vocabulary of these poems comes from rural domestic life, yet the experience of sorrow extends well beyond it.

"Music before Song" awakens memory of an absent beloved through audible signs. In "The Mark of a Voice," sound becomes the basis of recognition, sustaining the hope of reunion across fields and threshing floors, rivers and streams, countries and distances. In "Scorched Melody," a dialogue between a bud and a cuckoo creates a poignant moment of attachment and estrangement. Love is thus not simply affection: its meanings are produced within time, distance, misunderstanding, and silence. Even so, familiar tropes—flower, thorn, cuckoo, and the season of spring—are repeated in certain lines so often that the freshness of experience is somewhat reduced.

16. Linguistic Structure: The Rhythm of Vernacular Speech and the Insistence upon Argument

The most effective feature of the collection's language is its dialogic quality. Forms of address and questioning such as "why," "how," "tell me," "listen," and the vernacular vocatives *yau* and *gai* do not allow the reader to remain an external spectator: the reader becomes a participant in a public argument. The peasants in "Famine," the grass-cutters, elders, husband, and Dolnī in "Dolnī the Witch," the labourer and gatekeeper in "The Disabled Labourer," and the grandfather and grandson in "Aspiration" all use speech to advance the poems' events. Village language is not linguistic ornament; it becomes a medium through which the balance of social power is expressed.

An accessible use of end-rhyme, short lines, repeated words, and sound imitation gives the collection an audible character. In "Falling Drops," sequences of *būn-būn*, *gun-gun*, and *jhun-jhun* endow the image of rain with a body of sound. In "Hail the Farmer," the refrain suggests the possibility of collective performance in folk song. Excessive cataloguing supplies the momentum of satire in "The Battle of Moustaches." The brief lines of "Listen a Moment" achieve an aphoristic compression. The meaning of words changes with the movement of their sound through the line.

Common regional words—*bīā* (seed), *cās* (cultivation), *bathān* (cattle enclosure), *khaliyān* (threshing floor), *ghasabāhin* (grass-cutting women), *hansūā* (sickle), *ghūr* (hearth or ash-heap), *partī* (fallow land), and *kādo* (mud)—connect the poems to Mithila's agrarian experience. Literary dignity is determined here not by forbiddingly Sanskritised diction but by the capacity to express the complexities of local life. Yet the pursuit of similar sounds sometimes forces syntax to obey rhyme rather than its natural movement. The strength of the poems is their folk rhythm, and their risk is inherent in that very strength.

17. Narrativity, Point of View, and the Poetic Scene

In *Vasundharā*, the division between narrative and poetry is not always sharply defined. "Dolnī the Witch" unfolds through sequences of events, shifts of speaker, and dramatic tension; "The Disabled Labourer" reveals an entire class relationship through a single incident; "Aspiration" changes a state of mind by a final reversal; "The Pet Pigeon" brings domestic intimacy into collision with

violence at the close. The criterion by which these works become "poetry" is not rhyme alone but the condensation of events through imagery and voice.

In particular, what villagers say in the first section of "Dolnī the Witch" may mislead the reader, but later sections disclose the woman's experience and show that first account to be unreliable. This change of viewpoint leads the reader to reconsider a tendency to pass judgment merely upon hearing an accusation. In "Behind the Procession," the first-person speaker, situated within the offending crowd, is no external moral judge: he stands in the dock himself. These two works offer distinguished examples of the collection's experiments with narration.

One established means of constructing a poetic scene is the revaluation of a concrete symbol. Dolnī's sickle passes from labour to resistance; the building erected by the worker becomes proof of his lack of rights; the chair ceases to signify prestige and becomes a burden; the lamp becomes public illumination through the wasting of its own body. Ideas take more concentrated and memorable form in these objects than in direct exhortation.

18. "Hail the Farmer": A Hymn to Labour and the Memory of Contradiction

The collection's final poem, "Hail the Farmer," outlines the cycle of agricultural labour. Breaking fallow ground, crushing clods, working the mud, transplanting seedlings, enduring the winter chill of Māgh and the blazing heat of Vaiśākh: the temporal sequence of fieldwork joins with a refrain to become a song of collective respect. The farmer is called the pride of the nation, yet he also suffers continual humiliation. Because of this contradiction, the song ceases to be a simple panegyric and becomes a social question.

"Famine" and "Hail the Farmer" may be read as an intellectual dialogue between the beginning and the end of the collection. The first poem gives a concrete account of deprivation; the final poem reveals the dignity of labour. One investigates injustice, while the other accords the worker public honour. Yet an acclamation of respect does not in itself remove the economic problems described in "Famine." Reading the song alongside the opening poem therefore enriches its emotional force while also revealing its limited inclination to offer solutions.

19. Achievements and Limitations: Direct Statement versus Multivalent Poetry

The collection's first achievement is the courage to place socially neglected characters at the centre of poetry. A labourer excluded from a building he constructed, Dolnī's maternal grief distorted into an accusation of witchcraft, a peasant's suffering under debt and wage labour, and the remorse of a participant at the rear of a procession: these experiences appear not as generalised moral declarations but as truths embodied in incidents of Maithili poetic life. The

language of the poems remains attached to the objects and forms of address of everyday existence; ideas do not become a discourse detached from life.

A second achievement is the changing character of the poet's "I." If the "I" of "Famine" expresses the class experience of peasants, the "I" of "The Cheat" confesses a crime, the "I" of "Behind the Procession" becomes an accomplice to the crowd, and the "I" of "The Form of the Shadow" flees its own existence. The intrinsic value of self-criticism in many of the poems is visible here. The reader is not simply asked to agree; at times the reader is also placed in a position of dissent and self-interrogation.

The first artistic limitation is an excess of explanation. In some poems, after an image has developed a life of its own, the poet states its moral conclusion explicitly, diminishing the reader's scope to create meaning. Binary oppositions such as light and darkness, truth and falsehood, or flower and thorn sometimes produce constricted meanings. Especially in shorter poems, the pressure of end-rhyme can reduce experience to a relatively commonplace maxim. This limitation does not diminish the importance of the themes, but it demonstrates the need to maintain a distinction between poetry and manifesto.

The second limitation is the collection's structural unevenness. The seven-part "Dolnī the Witch" presents a substantial development in character, while numerous other poems conclude with a single idea or image. It would be unfair to regard this diversity merely as a defect; nevertheless, the works are not all artistically equal. Had the repetition of conventional emblems of beauty in the love poems, and the predictability of conclusions in the idea-driven poems, been disciplined by rigorous editing, the collection's overall effect could have been sharper still.

A third critical question concerns representation. In "Dolnī the Witch," the persecuted woman's voice ultimately becomes effective, yet a considerable period of the narrative passes under the judgment of a community dominated by men before the essence of her story is understood. This delay has an artistic purpose—to show the production of rumour—but the reader must also ask who ultimately possesses the power to recognise a woman's truth. The collection does not fully resolve this question; it does, however, make it more acute.

20. Conclusion: The Literary Contribution of *Vasundharā*

The essential achievement of *Vasundharā* is that it transforms the earth from a geographical backdrop into a living nexus of social justice, memory, labour, and resistance. The poet allows a tree to speak, sees the farmer through the history of his deprivation, makes the labourer a bearer of the history of construction, and grants Dolnī the right to tell her own story outside the crowd's accusation of "witchcraft." Within the collection's ethical geography, rights and humiliation, life and destruction, love and violence coexist upon the same earth.

In terms of poetic evaluation, the narrative architecture of "Dolnī the Witch," the visual contrast of "The Disabled Labourer," the self-accusation of "Behind

the Procession," the sharp concluding reversal in "The Pet Pigeon," and the environmental personification in "The Tree Being Felled" are particularly memorable. These works demonstrate that the poet's most effective language emerges when ideas are transformed into a character's situation, an object's form, and the internal tensions of experience. Where the poem becomes a direct announcement of its own conclusion, literary multivalence grows weaker.

Vasundharā, therefore, should neither be idealised as an entirely faultless model of people's poetry nor have its direct vernacular rhythm dismissed as inadequate craftsmanship. The collection's value resides in the questions it raises: who owns the fruits of labour? Whose testimony does a community hear? Where does personal guilt begin within a crowd? And why does the earth's life-sustaining presence not become justice in human conduct? Through these questions, *Vasundharā* remains an important text of social sensibility and poetic self-criticism in modern Maithili literature.

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Hamar Ṭol: The Social Body of the Hamlet and Resistance

Abstract

Rajdev Mandal's *Hamar Ṭol* is a narrative of rural life in Mithilā in which the small incidents of a hamlet become connected to the wider structures of caste, labour, gender, religious authority, education, health, the environment, and electoral politics. The central proposition of this study is that the novel's true protagonist is not any single individual but the collective life of the hamlet, constituted by voices, institutions, and relationships in mutual conflict. The love between Ajay and Śīlā, the humiliation arising from Nirmalā's childlessness, the religious power of Khelāvan Bhagat, the pressure exerted through communal feasts and village councils, and collective violence do not remain independent episodes: they illuminate one another. Alongside close textual reading, the article makes critical use of selected theoretical concepts concerning heteroglossia, narrative perspective, the social production of space, domination and resistance, and women's capabilities. Folk songs, *bhagait* performance, the dance of Rājā Salhes, the ironies of everyday speech, and the imagery of trees, darkness, light, fire, and water are shown to participate actively in the novel's production of meaning. Ultimately, although *Hamar Ṭol* sides with resistance to entrenched custom, it simultaneously presents the limits of the reformist individual hero, the failure of collective judgment, and the complexity of a violent social reality; its ending leaves open the possibilities both of hope and of crisis.

Keywords: *Hamar Ṭol*; Rajdev Mandal; Maithili novel; Dhanuk hamlet; caste; women's identity; folk culture; heteroglossia; social resistance.

1. Introduction: An Entire Society within a Hamlet

To evaluate the rural world of a Maithili novel is not merely to compile an inventory of village scenes, popular speech, or customs and rituals. The literary question is how the work represents the distribution of rights within the village, whose voice is considered worthy of hearing, and whose labour and lived suffering are made invisible in the name of social rules. Rajdev Mandal's *Hamar Ṭol* offers a distinctive response to this question. Here the hamlet is not merely a place: it is a network of relationships, a repository of memory, an arena of collective decision-making, and a possible site of violence. The possessive pronoun "our" certainly suggests intimacy, but the narrative gradually reveals the many layers of self-interest, prohibition, exclusion, and resistance within that intimacy.

According to the novel's publication details, its first edition appeared in 2012 from Shruti Prakashan, Delhi. The plot develops out of the life of a Dhanuk hamlet. The hamlet, which initially emerges through a mysterious image, later becomes the centre of varied scenes of religious observance, marriage, funeral

feasts, domestic quarrels, farming, migration, informal schooling, local justice, and voting. Amid this assemblage of events, Ajay's reformist consciousness and his love for Śīlā form an important narrative line; nevertheless, to treat this line as the whole novel would be to disregard the hamlet's other voices.

This review raises three principal questions: how communal proximity becomes a structure of power; how women and young characters resist oppression conducted in the language of belief; and how the fragmented, dialogue-centred form of the narrative accommodates the complexity of social reality. The study gives equal importance to the novel's achievements and its limitations in the process of evaluation.

2. The Approach to Reading and the Critical Framework

The study rests upon a close reading of the interrelationships among events from the opening to the end of the novel, the characters' dialogue, the narrator's interventions, and recurring symbols. Theoretical concepts are used not as ready-made templates imposed upon the work but as tools for clarifying events visible in the text. Bakhtin's heteroglossia facilitates an understanding of the conflict among social languages; Genette's narratological analysis distinguishes narration, dialogue, perspective, and the management of time; and Raymond Williams's thinking about the countryside guards against the idealisation of rural life.

In the analysis of social relationships, Bourdieu's ideas about practice and symbolic prestige, James C. Scott's overt and covert forms of domination and resistance, and Nussbaum's arguments concerning women's capabilities provide useful points of reference. These thinkers have different intellectual premises; their concepts are therefore not interchangeable. The discussion is confined to what the evidence of the novel permits.

3. Prologue: Dream, Water, and the Origin of the Hamlet

In the narrative's prologue, a small hamlet emerges amid an immense expanse of water, the strange contours of the Dhanuk settlement, the sounding of conch shells, Bābājī, and a blood-red vision. The narrator himself poses the difference between "dream" and "truth" as a question. The significance of this opening is not merely its creation of mystery. The hamlet whose birth the scene claims to witness is not a fixed geography: it is a social formation emerging from water, incorporating many features of popular life, and undergoing further transformation.

Religious vocabulary and surreal scenes coexist in this opening. They signal to the reader that the world of belief in the story ahead cannot simply be dismissed: its allure, fear, popular experience, and oppressive uses will all be encountered within the same cultural formation. At the novel's end, the image of the lovers seeking shelter in water amid flames establishes a meaningful relationship with this initial image of water. The first scene opens the question of the hamlet's construction; the last suggests the possibility of its ethical reconstruction.

4. The Hamlet: Collective Protagonist and Social Space

The narrative space of *Hamar Ṭol* continually expands and contracts among the home, the *gahvar* shrine, the crossroads, the peepal tree, the field embankment, the pond, the fields, the school, and the landowners' quarter. No site is neutral. The *gahvar* is a centre of religious prestige, but it is also where rituals of control over women's bodies take place. The crossroads is an open meeting place, but it also becomes a medium for rumours, verdicts, and the direction of the crowd. The shade of the peepal offers the possibility of a school, while the account makes clear that the benefits of the established school have remained restricted to a traditionally dominant quarter.

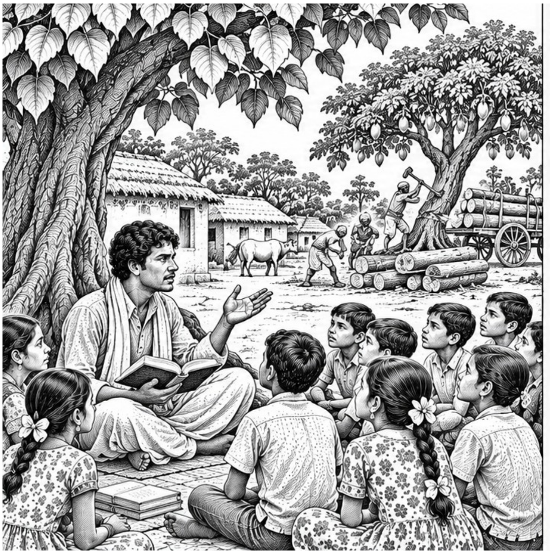
Such spatial divisions are connected to the unequal distribution of property and honour. The worship or feast organised by one group becomes an obligatory duty for another. A change in the location of the school changes access to knowledge. When ownership of a tree revered by the community is registered in another person's name, the use of its fruit, shade, and wood changes. Lefebvre's idea of "socially produced space" is pertinent here: physical distance is made meaningful by social power itself.

The hamlet's inhabitants know one another, yet the conclusion that "everyone understands everyone else's suffering" finds no support in the story. People gather during a crisis, but their gathering sometimes becomes an act of sympathy and sometimes a spectacle or an instrument of persecution. The novel's principal critical energy resides in this dual character of social solidarity.

5. Ajay: Educated Resistance and Its Contradictions

Ajay returns to the village after completing his college education; his failure to find suitable employment places him among the insecure, educated unemployed. His father, Jhaṭkalāl, had cherished the aspiration of spending substantially on his education. Returning to the village, Ajay is painfully aware of the distance between urban education and the local power structure. He resolves to change society's "inertia," teach children, and prevent injustices supported by customary belief. In this guise, he is not the inheritor of a hero's entitlement but an uneasy representative of obstructed social advancement.

Ajay's education takes concrete form in his actions: he protests the felling of a mango tree; insists that Manmā, a snakebite victim, be taken to hospital; begins teaching beneath a tree; refuses the compulsory funeral feast; encourages people to vote in the election; and intervenes when he sees Bhagat assaulting Nirmalā. It is this multiplicity of actions, rather than declarations of ideas alone, that makes Ajay a principal motivating force in the work.



The peepal-tree school and the felled mango tree: knowledge, labour, and ecological loss

Yet he is not an omniscient, omnipotent saviour. Manmā's death becomes an episode revealing both the unavailability of medical facilities and society's rejection of Ajay's reasoning. Caste quarrels among children reach his school. His refusal to hold a funeral feast increases social hostility towards him, while he cannot instantly establish an alternative communal institution. These failures make the character more human: individual courage is necessary but insufficient.

6. Nirmalā, or the Woman from Dharmḍīhī: Body, Motherhood, and Autonomy

Jagesar's wife relinquishes her birth name, "Nirmalā," and becomes "the woman from Dharmḍīhī" in the eyes of her marital household. In this renaming, the geography of her natal home is imposed upon her in place of an autonomous identity. Responsibility for childlessness is placed unilaterally upon her body; her husband considers a second marriage; neighbours make obscene comments about her; and the village council, while preserving her marital existence, fails to challenge the imperative of motherhood.

Nirmalā is not a passive victim. During an early ritual she resists Khelāvan Bhagat's inappropriate touching. When her husband strikes her, she again speaks in the language of protest, sometimes raising her own hand, sometimes announcing that she will seek justice before society. But the absence of social protection limits her options. When health, economic means, safe mobility, and respect within marriage are all insecure, she returns to Bhagat for refuge. What needs to be seen here is less the individual's supposed "irrationality" than coercive circumstances and structural deprivation.

Khelāvan Bhagat's claim to exorcise a spirit from Nirmalā's body gradually becomes a claim of sexual entitlement. The secluded ritual at the crossroads, the consumption of an unidentified drink, and the attempt to remove her clothing constitute a violent attempt to secure her submission. To read this incident as a miracle of faith or a romantic encounter would be an injustice to the text. Ajay's intervention stops the physical assault, but subsequent episodes show that the community may continue to believe Bhagat's account instead of questioning it.

Nirmalā's raising of the sickle in the final crisis marks the return of an autonomous female voice. She is no longer merely a character who has been "rescued"; she transforms her experience concerning her own body into an act of collective resistance. Viewed from Nussbaum's capabilities approach, the episode makes clear that a dignified life is created not through private willpower alone but through actual choices and social opportunities.

Nirmalā challenges religious authority and the control of women's bodies

7. Khelāvan Bhagat: The Economy of Religious Capital

Khelāvan Bhagat acquires authority through fear, inherited claims to specialist knowledge, ritual materials, and the organised presence of disciples. Childbearing, illness, snakebite, spirits, and inauspicious events are all explained within the same ritual system. People seek his help because treatments fail, public facilities are inadequate, and poverty leaves them few alternatives. To dismiss this dependence merely as the "mistake of an ignorant public" would diminish the novel's social acuity.

The conflict between Bhagat's exorcistic treatment and Ajay's insistence upon hospital care in the episode of Manmā's illness is particularly meaningful. Villagers mention the hospital's distance, the absence of a road, and the

unavailability of transport. The real failure lies in the convergence of miraculous belief with the absence of public infrastructure. Manmā's death is a bitter obstacle to the novel's reformist position: correct knowledge, deprived of institutional support, cannot by itself save a life.

The people's continued faith in Bhagat after his theatrical "battle with a spirit" is a decisive turning point in the conflict over knowledge. He presents his wounded body as evidence of a supernatural struggle undertaken for the people's benefit. This inversion of what counts as proof is significant: an event that ought to expose his misconduct becomes, through the power of communal storytelling, another source of prestige. From a perspective informed by Scott's analysis of domination, this is a struggle over whose interpretation will become public truth.

8. Caste, the Village Council, and the Ironies of Distributive Justice

The council convened over the dispute between Jagesar and Nirmalā emerges not as an institution of social justice but as an unstable combination of caste discipline, male self-interest, and transactions. The councillors' language claims the authority of godlike judgment, yet their personal gains and their interest in feasts, fodder, dhotis, and land are also exposed in the story. While the verdict criticises the beating of the wife, it accepts the possibility of a second marriage on account of childlessness. Thus, in the name of preventing an injustice, it perpetuates gender inequality.

The caste-based ostracism of Akalū Maḍar's family arises from its inability to provide a funeral feast. Rather than taking account of the crises of cultivation, famine, and subsistence, society imposes a prohibition on "fire and water"—the withdrawal of basic social relations. At the marriage of his daughter Līlā, ostracism resurfaces as a lack of social resources. The fact that women nevertheless come to sing, together with the tension among mutual support and social propriety, shows that ostracism cannot extinguish every human relationship.

After Ajay's father dies, the demand for a funeral feast reappears. People who offered no help while a family member was ill now demand obligatory hospitality after his death. The episode separates the communal significance of a rite from the reality of economic punishment. Food or ancestral rites are not in themselves the objects of criticism; the target is compulsory expenditure imposed upon an impoverished family in the name of preserving prestige.

One distinctive achievement of the novel is its refusal to compress oppression into a single linear opposition between "upper caste" and "lower caste." Factionalism within the Dhanuk hamlet, divergent interests within the same community, collusion with outside power, and values hostile to women make clear that inequalities of entitlement circulate across numerous relationships. The rhetoric of caste pride can energise collective identity, but can at times also suppress self-criticism.

9. Labour, Migration, and the Invisible Foundations of the Rural Economy

The songs of women transplanting paddy, together with references to men who have gone to Punjab and Delhi to earn a living, provide a brief but concentrated disclosure of the village economy. Women's fieldwork is not merely an auxiliary domestic role: it becomes a direct foundation of agricultural production. Nevertheless, they do not enjoy equal rights in the formal decisions of councils, worship, and communal affairs. This distance between the centre of labour and the centre of prestige contains the novel's structural critique of gender.

The account of migration reveals its double effect: it opens routes to earnings and new knowledge from the outside world, but does not automatically dissolve the village's dominant relationships. Educated Ajay's unemployment, the insecurity of wage labour, debt, neglected roads, and deficient health facilities demonstrate the uneven pace of development. In this situation, a simplified opposition between "tradition" and "modernity" is inadequate; where modern public institutions scarcely exist beyond their names, old mechanisms of control may prove more durable.

Minor episodes concerning oxen, fields, the mango tree, the expenses of communal feasts, subscriptions, and wages anchor the novel in economic reality. At one point a tree becomes the means of asserting a right to make a religious donation; elsewhere the pressure of the funeral feast opens the possibility of transferring farmland; elsewhere the teacher's irregular attendance deprives children of opportunities for literacy. Objects are not simply pictorial details: they are actual media through which relationships are transacted.

10. Marriage, Folk Song, and the Social Reading of Women's Lives

The extended episode of Līlā's marriage introduces a distinctive change in the novel's register. The wedding procession, music, meals, dress and decoration, fears of abduction, the delayed groom, accounts of robbery, rustic humour, and women's songs become intertwined. Within the auspicious celebration, anxiety over expense, the shadow of caste ostracism, and uncertainty about the bride's future remain constantly present. These scenes are not merely an attractive display of folk culture; they constitute a simultaneous life of pleasure, fear, labour, and resources.

The songs associate the granddaughter with a *ḍumrī* flower, the moment of leaving home, the metaphor of a golden cage, and the question of dowry. The image of the "golden cage" contains a bitter contradiction between an affectionate gift and a woman's restricted freedom of movement. The dance of Rājā Salhes opens the story onto shared cultural memory. The significance of folk song is not simply that it offers descriptive passages interrupting the plot: it voices collective experiences larger than any individual character's statement.

An episode of genealogical humour concerning Rāmaratī Maḍar is linked to child marriage, pressure to send an underage girl to her marital home, and a tragedy associated with childbirth. The narrator inserts the question of the

child's dissent into the community's teasing. At times the comic rhythm diminishes the intensity of the suffering; nevertheless, the underlying story also becomes a severe indictment of the disregard for women's wishes.

11. Education, Medicine, and Incomplete Access to Public Institutions

Ajay opens a school beneath the peepal tree because the government school is not effectively available to the hamlet. The language of caste exclusion immediately enters the children's relations; education is therefore no innocent domain isolated from society. The teacher's irregular presence and the selection of the school's location demonstrate that an institution's existence in name does not guarantee the real enjoyment of a right.

The episodes of medical treatment bring together the case for scientific medicine and the material barriers to obtaining it. When the attempt to save Manmā's life fails, Ajay's moral argument appears defeated in social memory; people can say that Bhagat's ritual was interrupted. The value of this scene lies not in a self-satisfied scientism but in the direct question it poses about the absence of public health provision. Development does not mean producing schemes in the people's name; it means ensuring their actual access to roads, education, treatment, and security.

Seen in the light of Amartya Sen's freedom-centred approach to development, both social constraints and public deprivation diminish human choice. The novel, however, is not a policy report: it gives these deficiencies an experiential reality through the crises of particular characters.

12. Nature: The Tree's Voice, the Memory of Water, and Ecological Judgment

The scene of felling the mango tree is a significant artistic turning point in the novel. The tree's suffering is expressed almost as if it were speaking; a living being that provides fruit, shade, clean air, and shelter to birds is to be cut down as part of a religious "gift and offering." Ajay's objection produces a conflict among the religious prescriptions of donation, control over property, and ecological judgment. His father Jhaṭkalāl considers the fulfilment of his donation to be religious duty; the son considers felling a living tree a moral offence. Their exchange reveals a palpable difference between their respective worlds of value.

The peepal tree becomes a place of boundaries, memory, refuge, and education; at moments the narrator perceives village life from the tree's point of view. Nature is therefore not merely decorative background but a sentient witness. Ajay's attempt to teach children under a tree and the scene of felling a tree intensify one another's meanings: the contrast between nurturing knowledge and destroying life is one of the work's central patterns.

The fire and water of the final section are not merely natural calamities. A violent crowd sets fire to a forest of *kāś* grasses and reeds; birds, insects, and other creatures are also caught in the destruction. Human social violence thus engulfs the nonhuman world as well. Amid the flames, water becomes a possible refuge

for the lovers' lives, but it would be premature to regard it as a wholly secure deliverance. Water becomes a figure both of protection and of uncertainty.

13. From the Village Council to the Ballot: The Usurpation of Democracy

The pressures, partiality, and transactions evident in the village council extend into the election scenes. A recital of the *Mahābhārata*, a feast, and the day of voting coincide at Dharmānand Bābū's house. On one side, the story of Draupadī being lost in a wager and of her threatened disrobing is told; on the other, voters from the poor hamlet are delayed by the attraction of food. The school serving as polling station lies in the landowners' quarter; when some residents arrive to vote, they are prevented by the allegation that votes have already been cast in their names, and violence and police baton charges follow.

This juxtaposition means more than ordinary satire. It establishes a sharp contradiction between the language of justice in a religious epic and the denial of contemporary civic rights. A society taking entertainment from the tale of Draupadī's humiliation also witnesses the deprivation of its own people's political voice. The same contradiction connects with the episode of an assault upon Nirmalā's body conducted in the name of ritual.

The voting episode also recapitulates the analysis of education: Ajay explains people's rights, but information alone cannot withstand institutional violence. Political indifference among the people is not wholly spontaneous; it has a history of repeated exclusion, bribery, fear, and disappointed hope. The work constructs a social situation in which "casting a vote" is not an ordinary administrative act but a struggle for entitlement.

14. Heteroglossia, Humour, and the Conflict of Social Speech

In the novel's extended scenes, brief comments, interruptions, satire, proverbs, and voices at different social levels are heard simultaneously. Women, men, children, Bhagat, councillors, young people, elders, and supporters of the landowners do not all speak from a single position of meaning. At times one utterance is overturned by the next. For example, the language that calls a councillor a god immediately collides with signs of his injustice and self-interest. This immediate reversal raises not merely a social laugh but a question about the legitimacy of authorised speech.

In Bakhtin's sense, novelistic heteroglossia is not a catalogue of separate words but a conflict among socially charged voices. In *Hamar Ṭol*, the voice of village gossip sometimes sustains religious propaganda and sometimes exposes its emptiness; women's whispers create a small space of resistance within public prohibitions; the young people's conversations become forums both for self-criticism and for the criticism necessary to reform.

Uchitvaktā is an intriguing figure within this heteroglossic structure. His quick comments sometimes question injustice, while at other times excessive mockery obscures the gravity of an issue. He is not the novel's definitive moral

representative; he exemplifies both the possibilities and the limits of social laughter. The author does not dissolve all the characters' voices into a single instructional conclusion; therein lies the novel's living dialogism.

Nevertheless, in certain episodes the narrator seems intent upon endorsing Ajay's reformist reasoning more explicitly; as a result, heteroglossic tension occasionally gives way to an expository monologue. This artistic limitation needs to be registered: the presence of many living social voices does not by itself establish that each enjoys equal autonomy everywhere in the text.

15. Narrative Time, Episodic Arrangement, and Shifts of Perspective

At the outset, the story assumes the form of a dreamlike prologue; it then progressively incorporates the densely realised scenes at the *gahvar*, marital conflict, village-council deliberations, Ajay's return to the village, marriage, a crisis over medical treatment, the school, ancestral rites, and the election. From time to time, a character's memory, a story heard from someone else, the history of generations, or an episode shaped by proverbial speech interrupts the principal sequence of events and opens an additional stratum of meaning. In Genette's terminology of narrative time, the relationship between story time and the time of narration changes continually: a single moment may be expanded into lengthy dialogue, while years may be compressed into a brief account.

The centre of perspective is likewise not fixed. Nirmalā's inward suffering, Jagesar's insecurity, Akalū's anxiety over the cost of a marriage, Ajay's internal questions, gossip passing from house to house, and the crowd's fear all become shifting centres within the same narrative. For this reason the novel does not become the autobiography of one or two heroes; it traces the collective mental life of the hamlet.

One limitation is that some events follow one another so rapidly that the intermediary processes of the characters' inner transformation are not fully developed. In particular, the social possibilities of questioning belief, the collective organisation of change, and the psychological motivations of individuals who participate in violence are not revealed as extensively as Ajay's moral pronouncements. Yet an argument in favour of this fragmentation is also possible: the hamlet's reality is itself composed of incessant interruptions and mutually competing events.

16. The Force of Satire and Its Ethical Risks

A distinctive quality of the author's writing is the union of bitter social criticism with the playful wit of local speech. Satire animates the story in depictions of councillors' self-interest, the financial calculations behind religious miracles, the disorder of a wedding, competition for prestige, and the dialogue of a dance troupe. The reader does not merely receive moral instruction; society's conduct becomes ridiculous in its own right.

Yet not all laughter is equally emancipatory. Comments about women's bodies, mockery of childlessness, and ridicule directed at disabled or uneducated people may function as techniques for exposing the characters' social cruelty, but they may also risk becoming entertainment for the reader. An interpreter must distinguish the narrator's perspective, a character's utterance, and the level of implicit criticism. Without this distinction, the characters' insulting language might be mistaken for values endorsed by the author, whereas the scene has often been constructed to reveal that language's corrupt social circulation.

17. Ajay and Śīlā: Love, Exclusion, and the Final Form of Violence

Ajay and Śīlā's relationship develops from childhood intimacy through separation in youth and eventual reunion. Śīlā is an orphan who endures physical harshness and emotional neglect under the guardianship of her uncle and aunt. Caste-based exclusion, the communal rules governing feasts, and surveillance of love restrict her private life. Here love is not merely personal attraction: it is the imagining of an alternative to relationships regulated by caste.

In the final episode, various people who benefit from the prevailing order and resent Ajay use his meeting with Śīlā as a pretext for a collective attack. An armed crowd surrounds a forest of *kāś* grass and reeds and sets it alight. Ajay is wounded; he and Śīlā repeat their resolve not to abandon each other. The vermilion made of blood, clothing caught by fire, and naked bodies create an image of love's extreme vulnerability outside social sanction, and of an intimacy sustained by mutual dependence.

Ajay and Śīlā: fire, water, social violence, and uncertain refuge

An important qualification is necessary: the author does not close the novel with an explicit, irreversible declaration that both lovers have died. They leap into the

water in an attempt to survive; the narrative ends with a symbolically charged, skyward image of their embrace. It would therefore be inappropriate to reduce the ending either to a straightforward tale of "martyred lovers" or to an assured "happy ending." Its distinctiveness lies in the simultaneous presence of real danger, an uncertain future, and hope for "change and development."

Nirmalā's act of taking up a sickle and running to intervene in the final moments is noteworthy. The woman whose body had initially been the object of Bhagat's ritual and the discipline of wifely virtue now becomes active in resisting collective violence. Through this act, the "our" in the title ultimately acquires a new meaning: the hamlet is not only an oppressive crowd; it also contains the possibility of alliances in opposition.

18. Literary Achievements, Critical Limitations, and Evaluation

The novel's first achievement is the interpretation of a multilayered social structure through a restricted geography. Religious and cultural practices, caste prestige, economic dependence, lack of health care, and gender regulation appear not as isolated compartments but as forces that generate one another. Its second achievement is the heteroglossic energy of everyday speech. Folk songs, mythic allusions, banter, rumours, and public debates make the credibility of the narrative world palpable. Its third achievement is to turn inequalities within the household into questions of public justice through Nirmalā's changing role, Śīlā's troubled life, and the world of women's agricultural labour.

The fourth achievement is nature's active presence. The tree's speech, recurrent darkness and light, and the closing images of fire and water give symbolic depth to rural realism. The fifth is the author's refusal to evade uncomfortable questions: Ajay fails to secure medical help in time; society once again believes Bhagat's account; caste violence enters the very beginnings of education; the right to vote may exist only on paper. For all these reasons, the novel does not become a simplified narrative of triumph.

The limitations are also clear. Ajay's ideas sometimes become direct reformist declarations that diminish the tension appropriate to the art. The inward, autonomous desires of some women characters, their individual futures, and the long-term effects of male violence emerge less fully. At times, the intervention of a courageous individual bears a disproportionate narrative burden in place of complex structural change. The satirical register of several episodes also risks creating distance between the reader's sensibility and the helplessness of the injured characters.

Nevertheless, it would be inappropriate to detach these limitations from the work's historical and social aspirations. The author does not merely draw up a list of the "evils" of rural society; he shows that every injustice fashions a story to justify itself. The critic's task is to read the contradictions, humour, dream, and violence present within those stories together.

19. Conclusion

The central achievement of *Hamar Ṭol* is its representation of the hamlet as a living social body formed out of unequal relationships. The luminous folk-cultural aspects of tradition and its oppressive uses do not occupy separate camps; very often both are present within the same ritual, song, meeting, or family relationship. Ajay's rational judgment is an important means of resistance, but its limitations show that social change cannot rest upon a single hero. Nirmalā's dissent, Śīlā's love, children's education, working women's labour, and the exchange of ideas among young people are distinct seeds of possible transformation.

At the close, fire represents society's destructive collectivity; water offers an unstable refuge for life; and the two bodies embracing between them embody the uncertain yet unbroken human longing for a future. This scene confirms the study's central proposition: the novel's aim is not to paint the hamlet in a single colour but to show the difficult process by which resistance is born within it. The importance of *Hamar Ṭol* to the study of the Maithili novel is established by this combined narrative method of rural realism, social heteroglossia, and ethical-cultural conflict.

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Jal Bhaṃvar: Society, Water, and Narrative

The Maithili Novel: Textual Criticism, Social Structure, Women's Experience, and Symbolic Resonance

Abstract

Rajdev Mandal's *Jal Bhaṃvar* does not present rural life in Mithilā merely as a private story of love; it tests the ethical possibilities of human existence amid caste, wealth, the village council, labour, illness, displacement, and crises of water. The tension arising from the relationship between Rājesar and Nītā gradually expands to encompass the partiality of communal institutions, attempts to assert control over women's bodies, uncertainty of livelihood, and the collective ordeal of a flood. This study analyses, in their interrelationship, the sequence of events across the novel's twenty-two divisions, the narrative circuit constructed through dreams, the spatiality of the Kosi and its channels, the multiplicity of voices in dialogue, the legitimacy of the village council, Nītā's resistance, and the ethics of care practised by Simānpurvālī. Gérard Genette's account of narrative time, Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, and Henri Lefebvre's conception of social space serve as interpretative instruments for this reading; the theory is not imposed upon the original narrative. The study concludes that the novel's decisive literary achievement lies in bringing the physical danger of water and the human-made whirlpool of society into a single symbolic system. Nevertheless, the community's eventual acceptance of the protagonist on account of his altruism does not wholly neutralise the institutional questions raised by caste exclusion. The closing dream and the possibility of rescue heard from a distance sustain the coexistence of hope and uncertainty.

Keywords: *Jal Bhaṃvar*; Rajdev Mandal; Maithili novel; caste; village council; women's identity; Kosi; flood; vernacular speech; narratology.

1. Introduction: The Interlocking Whirlpools of Individual and Society

Water and society remain present together from the beginning of the novel to its conclusion. Its characters live amid riverbanks, village paths, crossroads, fields, courtyards, and village councils; their decisions are subject to the pressures of social relationships even more than to natural conditions. Rājesar's love and responsibilities, Nītā's self-respect, Jāgesar's untimely death, Bhukhnā's dissent, Kulānand's conspiracy, and Dharamlāl's changing outlook are interwoven to produce a collective narrative. It is essential to read the book's imagined world on its own terms, since the opening expressly states that the names of characters and places are fictional. Accordingly, the social reality of this narrative is approached not as the history of particular identifiable people but as a literary construction of social consciousness.

The central concern of *Jal Bhaṃvar* is not simply whether love triumphs. It also asks who possesses the authority to administer justice, whose voice is accepted as

collective truth, and how standards of moral standing alter when disaster arrives. In this sense, the novel gives narrative form to the contradictions of rural modernity. Tradition offers support, yet its name is also invoked to legitimise exclusion, accusation, and punishment.

2. Textual Scope, Research Questions, and Analytical Method

The new 2019 edition of *Jal Bhaṃvar*, published by Pallavi Prakashan, Nirmali, is divided into twenty-two numbered sections. Four interrelated questions guide the analysis of the whole narrative: how the waterscape shapes the causal order and symbolic significance of the story; how caste, wealth, and the village council constrain individual freedom; how the experiences of women characters relate to the narrator's moral claims; and how the novel's final resolution stands in relation to the crisis with which it begins.

The method is grounded in close reading, sequential examination of events, interpretation of the implications of dialogue, and contextual scrutiny of symbols. Seymour Chatman's distinction between story and discourse allows the level of events to be separated from their presentation. Gérard Genette's discussions of order, duration, and narrative voice provide instruments for understanding movements between dreams, memories, and events. Bakhtin's conception of heteroglossia supplies a perspective on the collisions among talk at the crossroads, the pronouncements of councillors, women's protests, and communal rumours. These theories are comparative tools: the novel's formal distinctiveness is not presumed to follow automatically from them.

3. The Expansion of the Plot: From Private Love to Communal Crisis

At the outset, Rājesar dreams terrifyingly that he is clutching a tree branch to escape violent figures. Jāgesar's voice awakens him; the two brothers subsequently appear in an episode involving the assistance of a boatman in crossing a river channel. Soon Rājesar's meeting with Nītā and their mutual attraction become the new centre of narrative movement. Nītā already recognises that the social obstacles to their love will arise both from caste and from wealth. The initial scenes of love take place beside the channel; from that point, water becomes the shared background of emotional longing and actual danger.

Village-council proceedings, labourers' protests, the arrogance of landowners, and disputes about the balance of power carry the novel beyond the confines of private romance. Jāgesar's death in a boating accident abruptly turns the story towards familial grief and economic responsibility. The search for his body, the desolation of the riverbank, the future of his widowed wife, and Rājesar's helplessness give the river setting a frightening reality distinct from purely scenic beauty.

The river crossing: work, livelihood, and the dangerous current of the Kosi

On the one hand, the death of Larenā's wife in an incident involving poison brings male-centred domestic authority, the police, and the links between political leaders and councillors into discussion. On the other, episodes of illness, poverty, and treatment by an *ojhā* disclose a crisis of resources. Family necessity compels Rājesar to leave for work in Delhi and Punjab. During his absence, Kulānand turns caste prestige into an issue and creates a hostile atmosphere; the conspiracy against Nītā, her resistance, the council of the hamlet, and Mataruvā's violent response bring the narrative to its sharpest social crisis.

Simānpurvālī turns Nītā away from a path of self-destruction and shelters her. Later, Rājesar's return and the couple's reunion hold out the possibility of life together. Conversation among the villagers refers to a marriage performed at a temple; significantly, this information reaches the reader through social discussion rather than through a directly represented wedding scene. The final flood places all the antagonistic characters in a shared struggle for survival. The efforts of Rājesar, Nītā, and others to rescue people; the saving of Dharamlāl's grandson; and the gratitude of former opponents extend the novel's moral denouement.

4. Narrative Time: Dream, Memory, Foreshadowing, and Recurrence

The novel begins with a terrifying dream; near its end Rājesar again dreams that he is confined in a dark house, calling to others for help. The opening attempt to save his life by grasping a tree branch meaningfully parallels the actual episode in which he catches hold of a branch to escape the final whirlpool. Through this recurrence, the protagonist's life is not presented as a linear tale of success: insecurity remains an enduring structure of his consciousness.

After Jāgesar's death, Rājesar remembers his brother's earlier words; later Nītā repeatedly recalls her father's violence and Kulānand's conspiracy. Memory here does not halt the story but interprets suffering in the present. Some scenes expand a brief interval of inward experience, whereas periods of work, travel, and the passing of months enter the narration in compressed form. From Genette's perspective, this arrangement of duration appears to vary in accordance with the density of the characters' mental experience.

The final rescue does not immediately announce the establishment of complete social harmony. Exhausted, Rājesar and Nītā sit together and fall asleep; Rājesar's dream contains a closed dark house, light, an opening door, and a rumbling sound. On waking, he sees a helicopter circling in the sky, and the narrator uses the language of conjecture in suggesting its possible purpose. This conclusion keeps the crisis of a Mithilā village open to the distant presence of the state and to collective hope.

5. Water, River Channels, and the Kosi: The Active Role of Setting

Trees, sand, *kāś* grass and reeds, boats, river channels, banks, clouds, rain, and fields are not merely atmospheric ornaments in the novel. Waiting for a boatman to cross a channel, the river's current, a boat's sinking, the routes to work, and entrapment in water once again generate major narrative events. At different moments, the river becomes a route of passage, the cause of death, a place of lovers' meetings, and a demanding test of rescue. Because of this manifold presence, "water" cannot be confined to a single auspicious or inauspicious symbol.

In the episode of Jāgesar's death, the bank of the Kosi becomes a mute site of mourning; Rājesar experiences helplessness amid the deserted sandbanks. The ordinary rhythm of life, the structure of the household, and the continuity of a worker's existence are severed by a single accident. This scene supports an understanding of the river as a force that constitutes locality. In the light of Lefebvre's conception of social space, one may say that the waterscape organises the relationships through which labour, distance, access, safety, and social refuge are determined.

In the final flood, the elevated site of the school becomes a temporary communal refuge. Water filling the spaces around the houses imposes a severe test upon social divisions; collective effort becomes necessary to carry the vulnerable across. Yet it would be unwarranted to draw the simplistic conclusion that a natural disaster eliminates every social distinction. Disaster affords people an opportunity to make decisions beyond their prejudices; the novel does not explicitly establish that the opportunity results in lasting institutional transformation.

6. The Title "Bhaṃvar": The Movement of Water and Society's Snare

The title's internal significance becomes clear relatively late, but with great force. Bhukhnā tells Rājesar: "Society, too, has a net like a whirlpool of water, and you have become trapped in it. To break it, you will have to fight." This dialogue

interprets the title, yet it is not, in itself, the narrator's final pronouncement. Rājesar immediately asks whether conflict might be answered with peace and wrongdoing with beneficence. The exchange identifies the novel's central dilemma: what ethical method ought to govern the struggle against injustice?

The whirlpool has a double meaning. One is a physical movement of water capable of drowning a person; the other is the circular motion of social relationships, drawing the individual towards their centre through lies, rumours, fear, caste honour, greed, and communal punishment. The presence of the word "net" in this symbolism is significant: social power is not concentrated in one person or institution but extends across families, hamlets, councillors, landowners, and intimate relationships. Bhukhnā's insistence upon struggle and Rājesar's insistence upon doing good in return reveal the political implications of the symbol.

At the climax, Rājesar really is caught in a whirlpool while saving Dharamlāl's grandson and escapes by grasping a tree branch. The title thereby passes beyond symbolic assertion to become a bodily peril. In this scene the opening dream, the characters' ideological argument, and the final deed confer meaning upon one another. It is one of the novel's most successful formal integrations.

7. Caste and Economic Inequality: The Social Prohibition of Love

Nītā anticipates opposition to their love from the outset. Her statement, "I am beneath you both in caste and in wealth," expresses not merely a personal sense of inferiority but the pressure of a hierarchy established by society. Caste and economic standing here are not separate obstacles: each reinforces the other. Nītā's further apprehension—that family and society will prevent the relationship—is substantiated by subsequent events. Rājesar's fearless assurances and Nītā's caution reveal unequal risks within a shared emotional attachment.

Nītā bears the more immediate punishment for love. In the man's absence, her body, conduct, and reputation become matters of public testimony. The decision to deny Rājesar's mother and household access to labour and social relations exposes the economic dimension of this control. By transforming the ethical question of love into a matter of collective caste discipline, Kulānand gives his private jealousy the appearance of institutional authority. The struggle to secure public assent and preserve prestige becomes more consequential than any effort to establish Nītā's alleged "fault."

A caution is necessary in reading this episode: the caste system must not be reduced to the machinations of a few wicked individuals. Kulānand organises the falsehood, but his accusation works because punishment by the caste council, the fear of public disgrace, and ostracism already constitute an effective social apparatus. The structure provides the prepared ground for conspiracy. For this reason, Rājesar's personal virtue may ultimately recover his standing without, by itself, breaking the underlying rules of social inequality.

8. The Village Council: The Promise and Perversion of Popular Justice

The novel's criticism of the village council is not a straightforward repudiation of tradition. The narrator remembers an ideal of earlier councils that separated "milk from milk and water from water"—that is, distinguished right from wrong—but depicts bribery, caste prejudice, factionalism, and distinctions between insiders and outsiders in the present. Memory here supplies a standard of ideal justice against which existing conduct is tested. Nevertheless, it would be inappropriate to accept that memory as a demonstrated historical proposition; it is the novel's moral perspective.

The dispute between Malesar and Bhukhnā, the reactions of labourers supporting Rājesar, the dominance of the councillors, and Parbhudās's peaceful intervention allow several voices to be heard in public decision-making. The whispers of those in weaker positions and the command exercised over the assembly by powerful people reveal unequal opportunities for public speech. The same institution later becomes the basis of a sponsored accusation against Rājesar. When a forum intended to administer justice becomes an apparatus of partisan testimony, threats, and the extraction of penalties, it forfeits its moral legitimacy.

The village-council scenes also generate dramatic energy. Questions and counterquestions, interruptions, objections, collective laughter, folk sayings, and the sudden arrival of information all propel the narrative discourse. From the perspective of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, these exchanges matter because no single utterance can stand as the voice of an entire village; yet the voices nourished by power receive greater recognition. The novel shows how that recognition is produced.

9. Family Bereavement, Labour, and the Compulsion of Livelihood

Jāgesar's death is not simply an emotional episode. With his brother's loss, Rājesar also loses a source of security, advice, and livelihood. Because the body cannot be recovered, the question of funeral rites remains open; the futures of the widowed sister-in-law, the children, and the elderly mother become Rājesar's responsibility. In this way the river accident makes visible the division of labour within the household and inequalities of resources. The emergence, amid mourning, of the phrase "the family's burden now" lends a structural significance to personal grief.

The absence of employment forces Rājesar to leave the village for Delhi and Punjab. This journey is no celebration of success but a constrained choice; his loyalties are torn between attachment to home and the need for income. Absence also becomes a crisis for private relationships, since Kulānand seizes that moment as an opportunity to spread caste-based accusations. The novel thus connects labour migration with shifting relations of domestic control: going away to earn a living can offer a way out of injustice while simultaneously exposing the household left behind to greater vulnerability.

10. Nītā's Experience: Consent, Self-Respect, and Resistance to Violence

Nītā is among the novel's most important ethical centres. She recognises the social dangers from the beginning and continues to raise questions about her caste and economic position even after Rājesar assures her of his devotion. While she is winnowing rice in Dharamlāl's house, Kulānand attempts to exploit her vulnerable position as a worker. Nītā refuses his financial inducements, bodily advances, and coercion; she gives tangible expression to dissent by slapping and pushing him away. The scene establishes that her role is not merely that of a long-suffering beloved but that of a woman who actively resists.

Humiliated by rejection, Kulānand invokes public caste honour as a pretext. The episode exemplifies the story's moral reversal: the actual aggressor declares himself the guardian of society, while the victim is made to carry the burden of wrongdoing. Paying money to Bhūmā to influence opinion and convening a hamlet council show how communal structures can be misused to shield a private offence. The mobilisation of collective humiliation against a woman's resistance is among the novel's gravest episodes from a feminist critical perspective.

Mataruvā accepts the language of punishment, beats his daughter, and expels her from the home. Nītā is not even given an opportunity to state her case; the intimate bond between father and daughter disintegrates behind the walls of public shame. Her movement towards thoughts of suicide is presented not as a sign of personal weakness but as a dreadful consequence of social isolation and institutional violence. Here the private right to love becomes a question of the social right to live.

11. Simānpurvālī: An Alternative Sociality of Care

The role of Simānpurvālī, Rājesar's sister-in-law, prompts a serious reconsideration of the novel's communal morality. On one side, villagers circulate various stigmatising remarks about her; on the other, she saves Nītā from a crisis beside the river, wipes away her tears, and offers her a place to live. Against the claims of a father and council to exercise authority over Nītā's life, Simānpurvālī establishes a relationship founded upon protection, shared labour, and compassion.

This role is particularly important because Simānpurvālī herself suffers social neglect. The death of her sick child and the episode of her psychological distress form part of the novel's sorrowful atmosphere; nonetheless, she does not remain merely an object of suffering but becomes a source of refuge and safety for Nītā. Her standing at the doorway with a sickle in response to villagers' abusive words gives visual form to her resolve to protect. A woman-centred alternative community emerges here outside the traditional village council.

Nītā and Simānpurvālī: care as resistance to public accusation

A second important line of women's experience in this text concerns the death of Larenā's wife in an incident involving poison. The characters ask whether she consumed the poison herself or was made to consume it; the young men also connect the woman's death to continuing abuse within the household. The novel presents the matter not as a conclusion established by investigation but as disputed social information and collective discussion. In this form, its significance lies in the interrelated problems of rumour, domestic violence, and judicial uncertainty.

12. Health, Belief, and the Ethical Significance of Poverty

In its episodes of illness and treatment, the novel does not construct a superficial opposition between popular belief and modern medicine; the economic accessibility of treatment becomes the fundamental issue. When a patient is taken to an *ojhā* and a shrine, educated young men object, but others invoke the high cost of medicines, the lack of money, and previous experience. Rājesar, too, understands that ritual exorcism alone is inadequate, yet he lacks the means to secure appropriate treatment. The episode renders any criticism of "superstition" incomplete without an analysis of economic compulsion.

Considered together, the death of Simānpurvālī's child and the illnesses of Rājesar's relatives make it clear that the kindness of individual people cannot, by itself, guarantee security of health. The cost of treatment, access to facilities outside the village, livelihood, and social ostracism complicate the experience of sickness. The novel offers no comprehensive policy solution to these structural problems; nevertheless, it gives them effective literary form by showing how inequalities of health affect a family's identity, hope, and sorrow in everyday life.

13. Dialogue, Folk Sayings, and the Narrator's Reflective Disposition

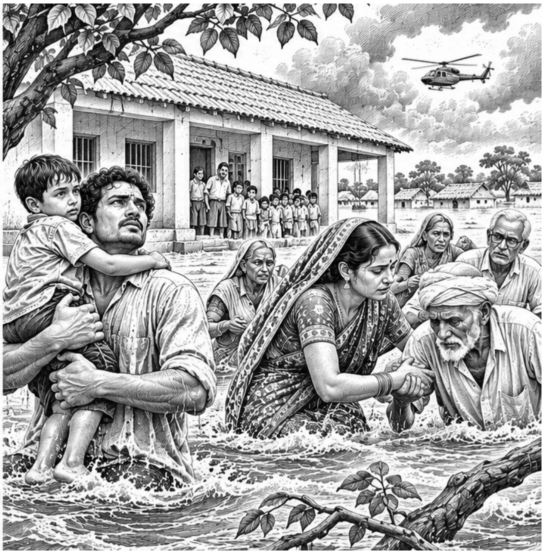
The novel's language is connected to the living intellectual world of rural Maithili. Forms of address and speech such as "rau," "hau," "yau," "chai," "kie," and "kahait" do more than provide local colour; they establish distinctions of social proximity, hierarchy, contempt, and affection. The tenderness of Rājesar and Nītā's exchanges, the harsh commands uttered in council, Bhukhnā's forthright dissent, Mataruvā's angry pronouncements, and Simānpurvālī's reassurance constitute different cultures of speech. The novel's social interiority gains density from these linguistic differences.

The narrator frequently inserts generalisations drawn from experience into the course of events: observations about human self-interest, anger, grief, time, death, and social conduct. This develops a vernacular ethical register in the prose. In many places such comments elevate events to a plane of reflection, as in the injustice of the village council or the bitterness produced by deprivation. In some scenes, however, repeated general statements explicate the significance of events before it can emerge of its own accord. There is thus a creative tension between narrative art and the impulse towards the moral exemplum.

Descriptions of the natural world are exceptionally effective in several passages. Sunlight, expanses of sand, wet hair, the sounds of crickets, the drip of rain, silence, tree branches, and darkness give tension a bodily presence. The subtle recurrence of physical movements between the opening panic and the final rescue in the water creates internal cohesion. Alongside this aesthetic achievement, it is necessary to evaluate the combination of layers of voice arising from the characters' perspectives and the narrator's omniscient commentary.

14. Ethical Transformation and a Critical Reading of the Conclusion

In the climactic flood, Rājesar first takes his family to safety on higher ground and then rescues the elderly, the vulnerable, and those trapped by the water. Nītā also takes people by the hand and helps them across. Rājesar goes to rescue the missing child of Sulekha, Dharamlāl's daughter. After enduring a head injury and the dangers of a whirlpool, he brings the child back alive, whereupon Dharamlāl praises his action in public. Villagers propose making him the *mukhiyā*, or village head; in response, Rājesar calls society his family and says that he seeks neither office nor gain.



The flood: a child rescued and vulnerable neighbours carried towards shelter

One possible reading of this ending is that altruism and human cooperation provide a way to break the cycle of social revenge. Rājesar's deed becomes a public statement in response to Bhukhnā's demand for struggle. The reconfiguration depicts the protagonist's ethical elevation, yet also leaves questions unresolved: how is the institutional responsibility of the group that had become an instrument of accusation and punishment to be determined? Can one moment of heroism really annul caste discipline, injustice in council, and the humiliation of women?

The novel provides reasons to be wary of declaring an unqualified happy ending. Social acceptance of the relationship between Rājesar and Nītā increases gradually; the reader learns of their temple wedding through village conversation. After the flood, the protagonist's reputation is certainly restored, but the text offers no extended scene of self-examination or enduring reform by the institutions responsible for the initial injustice. The final helicopter is a sign of hope, but the narrative's own language presents it as a possibility, not assured deliverance. The openness here enhances the novel's artistic credibility.

15. Literary Achievements, Limitations, and the Wider Significance of the Maithili Novel

The first significant achievement of *Jal Bhaṃvar* is its successful deployment of a symbol at once simple and capacious. The whirlpool recurs not merely as a title but across dialogue, circumstances, bodily action, and sequences of dreams. A second achievement is the multivoiced representation of collective village life: agricultural labourers, councillors, relationships within the hamlet, relatives, young people, political leaders, physicians, *ojhās*, widows, and migrant workers

are connected through one another's actions and destinies. Its third achievement is to place Nītā's self-respect and Simānpurvālī's culture of sheltering others at the centre of narrative construction.

To discuss the work's limitations is not to diminish these achievements. Some of the narrator's aphoristic moral pronouncements reduce the openness and plurality of meaning that the episodes might otherwise sustain. Certain characters become relatively unambiguous embodiments of power, greed, and wickedness; their inner conflicts are less extensively developed than those of the protagonist or Nītā. The collective praise offered at the end resolves the juridical and social questions with comparative haste. These features may be understood as part of a broadly popular-idealist framework whose literary power lies in its collective ethical consciousness, and whose limitation lies in an incomplete examination of institutions.

In the context of Maithili prose, the novel is noteworthy because it does not turn rural language merely into a memorial of a vanished way of life. Instead, that language is used to raise questions of gendered honour, caste control, labour migration, the absence of medical care, and disaster. "The people" here are not a unified, innocent, and morally pure community; they are internally divided, contentious, compassionate, and cruel, all at once. The novel's genuine contemporaneity consists in its absorption of this complexity.

16. Speech, Rumour, and the Politics of Evidence

One subtle aspect of the social realism of *Jal Bhaṃvar* is the process through which information is acquired and made into truth. In meetings of the village council, direct events, testimony, hearsay, and fabricated accusations do not always remain separate categories. Whenever a powerful person circulates an interpretation among the people, that interpretation risks becoming part of collective memory. In the first council meeting, a disagreement beginning with a labourer's goat, work, the employer's expectations, and reciprocal respect gradually becomes a struggle over responsibilities and rights. At the later caste-council meeting, a similar forum is transformed from a search for truth into the public performance of accusation.

In the episode involving the allegation against Jhapsū and Lālkānt's rebuttal, the councillors repeatedly demand reasons and answers. Such inquiry seems procedurally necessary from the institution's point of view; nevertheless, an individual's social standing, the force of their voice, and the atmosphere of fear influence the direction of the decision. The novel captures precisely this fragile point of reality: asking questions is not the same thing as conducting a fair hearing. The facts offered by someone whose opportunities to speak are restricted themselves appear comparatively weak. The problem grows more severe in Nītā's case, for testimony is constructed in the name of the absent Rājesar while the space afforded to Nītā's own account becomes progressively smaller.

Economic inducement and appeals to caste are two parts of a single technique in Kulānand's scheme. Money given to Bhūmā converts private resentment into the language of collective "honour." Although Dharamlāl is the father, he understands the predicament created by his son's misconduct; yet in order to preserve social prestige he considers first prejudicing Mataruvā against the couple. Taken together, these events show how the phrase "society says" is often simply an enlarged version of "a few influential people said." The novel's social criticism is powerful because it reveals the effects of rumour, not merely the psychology of those who spread it.

The episode of Larenā's wife's death by poison presents another instance of this crisis of knowledge. The young men distinguish between "she took it herself" and "she was made to take it"; they also advance the possibility of a death compelled by abuse. Incomplete information arriving from unspecified sources, fear of the police, and ties between political leaders and councillors further complicate the event. Such unresolved social information is important in literature: instead of inviting the reader to pronounce readily upon the truth of an accusation, the author encourages attention to the source, purpose, and consequences of the claim.

17. The Labouring Body, Material Deprivation, and Ethical Choice

For Rājesar, wage labour is not merely a means of income; it governs the distribution of his time and his emotional relationships. Transplanting rice, working in the fields, discussion of selling straw, the scarcity of local employment, and a shortage of cash indicate a rural economy in which household labour is continually necessary but its returns remain unstable. The same circumstances that make Rājesar seek earnings elsewhere also create the opportunity for social manoeuvres against Nītā. Economic compulsion and the politics of power here do not belong to separate chapters; they form part of one causal sequence.

The most effective aspect of social ostracism is its capacity to produce a shortage of food in the home. Villagers refuse to provide work for Rājesar's mother and sister-in-law; eventually they are compelled to seek support in another village. This form of punishment reaches beyond a person's reputation to diminish independence of livelihood. Without presenting statistical data, the novel shows the everyday operation of economic violence: a society that designates someone a moral offender may also refuse to pay for that person's labour.

In the struggle against calamity, the meaning of labour changes. During the flood Rājesar's body is marked by wounds, exhaustion, mud, and water; Nītā helps elderly and vulnerable people cross by holding their hands. The labour of saving lives becomes necessary for the very society that had earlier oppressed through its collective judgments. The story makes this difference an ethical reversal, but leaves the reader to decide whether the genuine social standing of labour has permanently improved.

18. Darkness, Light, and the Aesthetic Organisation of an Open Ending

Darkness and light continually alternate in the visual arrangement of the prose. In the darkness of the first dream, a group of violent creatures encircles Rājesar; the light of dawn opens his waking life. After Nītā's humiliation, the darkness of night intensifies her isolation. In the final flood, the wind extinguishes a lamp, water occupies every side, and the elevated school grounds become a temporary boundary of survival. Natural scenery here is not a simple mirror of emotion but an active environment: people's ability to act changes with light, rain, and the force of the current.

Sound is no less important. At the outset, panting, growling, the creaking of a tree, and Jāgesar's call compose the rupture of the dream. In the news of Jāgesar's death, the succession of weeping and silence conveys the breakdown of social support. In the village council, noise, guffaws, and whispers become the acoustics of collective power. At the end, a rumbling sound breaks Rājesar's sleep. At several turning points, sound thus signals meaning in advance of the visible scene.

It would be mistaken to read the helicopter in the last scene as a wholly felicitous resolution. In his dream Rājesar seeks a way out of a dark house; on waking he sees an aircraft circling in the sky, whose purpose the narration leaves conjectural. The scene also marks the distance between local people's labour and possible relief from outside. The work undertaken to save lives is visibly present; the state apparatus of rescue is, for the moment, a possibility seen from afar. Through this two-tiered staging, hope, exhaustion, and unanswered questions coexist at the conclusion.

Conclusion

In Rajdev Mandal's *Jal Bhaṃvar*, the natural river channel and social structure become metaphors for one another. Rājesar's recurrent experience of saving himself by clutching a tree branch depicts not only the preservation of a human life but the struggle to escape relationships of subjection. Nītā expresses her dissent against punishments imposed in the name of public shame; Simānpurvālī safeguards her life, making care an alternative foundation for the construction of community. Bhukhnā supplies the language of struggle against injustice, while Rājesar advances the possibility of answering harm by doing good. These two positions are not simple equivalents: the novel's distinctive question inhabits the tension between them.

The final flood tests human action, but does not establish that earlier social injustice has entirely ended. Acknowledging this difference clarifies the distance between the novel's ethical aspiration and its social reality. Escape from the whirlpool means, first, preservation of life; second, social recognition; and third—the achievement of which remains uncertain—the creation of a durable order of justice. The final light preserves this third meaning as a question for the future. At its strongest moments, *Jal Bhaṃvar* compels its reader to consider

that compassion is necessary for breaking society's snare, but that justice is indispensable alongside compassion.

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Jāl: Debt, Caste, and Women's Resistance

A Critical Study of the Screenplay Form and Social Significance of Rajdev Mandal's Jāl

Abstract

Rajdev Mandal's *Jāl* employs the familiar narrative elements of love, familial obligation, and crime in an attempt to give visual expression to the interlocking relations of debt, property, caste, and gendered domination in rural society. On one side stand Vikram's working life, education, and aspiration to enter the police service; on the other stand the patriarchal restrictions imposed upon Barsā's education, love, and choice of marriage partner. The moneylender Suidchan's collection of interest and access to institutions, together with the violence of his son Hariya, give the title *Jāl*—"the net"—its social meaning. Crossings of the river, the boat, bicycle, horse, letter, train, and disintegrating security of the household become important visual signs in the screenplay. From its initial love episode the narrative advances towards a scene of collective resistance, in which the pregnant Phuliya and her mother Chanki challenge the powerful moneylender's family. This study examines the structure of the plot, dialogue, arrangement of scenes, agency of female characters, intersections of caste and class, and inconsistencies of the text and its editing. It concludes that *Jāl* derives its literary significance from its scrutiny of rural power and its possibilities for women's resistance; its artistic limitations become apparent in the repetition of scenes, insufficient development of certain relationships, and the inconclusive outcome of the conflict.

Keywords: Maithili screenplay; Rajdev Mandal; moneylending debt; caste; patriarchy; women's resistance; visual composition; rural society.

1. Introduction: The Purpose of Screenwriting and the Questions of Criticism

At the beginning of *Jāl*, Rajdev Mandal speaks of perceiving a scarcity of screenplays in the context of Maithili literature and of offering a modest attempt to address it. This authorial statement clarifies the work's generic ambition, but it would be inappropriate to treat the writer's impression as decisive evidence for the entire history of Maithili screenwriting. What matters is his choice of a medium in which the story is enacted through scenes, setting, character movement, and dialogue rather than merely narrated. Criticism of the work must therefore examine separately, and subsequently together, the social acuity of its subject matter and the visual craft of the screenplay.

The relationship between Vikram and Barsā undoubtedly occupies the centre of the work, but its social tensions do not arise simply from the union or separation of two lovers. The obstacles confronting their love are constituted by the moneylender's economic control, caste prohibitions upon marriage, the assertion of ownership over the woman's body, and the impunity enjoyed by an influential family. To regard *Jāl* as a linear love story would consequently restrict its social meaning. The central questions of this study are how different forms of domination reinforce one another within the narrative, how the visual form embodies that domination, and to what extent the characters' resistance transforms the narrative's underlying movement.

This criticism is grounded in the events and directions for staging that are explicit in the work itself. Only those facts clearly established by the text are accepted as facts; interpretations concerning the characters' motives, social structures, or figurative relationships should be understood as critical inferences based on the text. Such a method maintains a balance between appreciation and objection, particularly where the work's subject is important but its visual execution is uneven.

2. Theoretical Context: Action, the Scene, and Social Vision

In Aristotle's *Poetics*, the ordering of action, the relationships among incidents, and the conception of a whole provide grounds for evaluating plot. Although *Jāl* is not an ancient tragedy, the question of whether its incidents are causally related remains useful in assessing its screenplay structure. Syd Field's account of screenwriting stresses the combined functioning of character, scene, narrative structure, and turning point. Viewed through these two perspectives, both the forceful initial establishment of *Jāl* and the loosening of structural control in its latter half become evident.

In their discussion of cinematic form, David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith clarify the significance of mise-en-scène, editing, and sound beyond the organisation of narrative. On this basis, merely writing "cut to" or "flashback" is insufficient: one must ask what change in narrative meaning, tension, or information a change of scene produces. The river scenes, recurring images of travel, collective noise, lamplight, and intervals of waiting are read here from precisely this standpoint.

In a critique of patriarchal vision, Laura Mulvey's study of cinematic traditions that turn women into objects of the gaze offers a provocative point of reference. The women of *Jāl*, however, are not merely visual objects; in its final scenes they also become agents of social protest. Dr B. R. Ambedkar's criticism of caste offers a useful comparative horizon for understanding caste regulation of marriage. These theoretical propositions are not taken as a ready-made schema to be imposed upon rural Maithili life, but as critical instruments for understanding contradictions actually present in the text.

3. Narrative Structure: From Romantic Attraction to Social Conflict

The first scene presents a wide-ranging picture of life on the riverbank: the morning sun, green surroundings, grazing animals, children at play, a boat, and, visible on the opposite bank, a school, college, station, and bus. The opening thus begins not with a protagonist's private crisis but with the wider spatial configuration of rural life. Immediately afterwards, Vikram's home comes into view: his mother milking the cow, her son rushing between study and livelihood, and the application form for employment. The economic foundation of the narrative is therefore laid before the romantic introduction. The love story does not arise as an ungrounded wish, but amid the actual pressures of a working life.

Scenes six through nine depict the accidental closeness of Vikram and Barsā, the awkwardness of stepping on a foot in the boat, the audacity of taking her hand, Barsā's anger, a second encounter at the post office, and a dream at night. Humour, attraction, and disagreement rapidly alternate. At first Barsā does not confirm Vikram's easy fantasy of romance: her silence, her attempt to move her foot away, and her explicit demand that he release her hand show that to romanticise a woman's unwillingness as the beginning of love would be a critical error. The opening possesses the quickness of a scene intended for spectators, but it also raises a subtle ethical question about consent.

From the tenth scene onwards the social crisis comes to the fore. Suidchan and the clerk's account books, Shyam Babu's mounting debt, the failure of cultivation, and the plan to deny him fertiliser and irrigation water together disclose the calculated character of moneylending power. The attempted abduction of Barsā, Vikram's intervention, the gathering of labourers, the strongman's revenge, and Shyam Babu's helplessness then link the incidents together. In this section the distinction between private love and public injustice disappears: the moral test of Vikram's romantic attachment becomes his intervention in society.

Between scenes twenty and twenty-seven the sequence of events assumes the shape of a larger conspiracy. Hariya restrains his gang in the matter of Barsā by invoking caste identity, while intensifying his anger towards Vikram. Suidchan sees in a marriage between Hariya and Barsā an opportunity both to recover debt and to acquire property; later he attempts to impose the decision upon Shyam Babu. Barsā speaks for Vikram before her father, but caste and rumour are used to forbid her from leaving home. Here the "net" tightens in both a material and a moral sense.

From the twenty-eighth scene, Vikram's letter concerning employment, his preparations to leave home, Raghua's delivery of a letter to Barsā, the rituals associated with marriage, and Barsā running after a train bring the narrative to the threshold of rapid change. The subsequent scenes introduce Barsā's disappearance, Shyam Babu's self-reproach and Hariya's search, followed by Phuliya's pregnancy and Chanki's resistance, which open a second social conflict. This final turn is significant because the question of women moves beyond the abduction of a beloved to sexual exploitation, responsibility for pregnancy, and public justice. Yet the screenplay does not make dramatically clear how the main Vikram–Barsā story and the secondary Phuliya–Hariya story are to converge decisively.

4. The Title *Jāl*: Debt, Institutional Access, and Marriage as Bargain

The clearest basis for the title *Jāl* lies in Suidchan's self-confidence. According to him, Shyam Babu will not receive fertiliser or water in time, nor will he obtain help from a bank; the moneylender's influence extends very far. This elevates moneylending beyond a simple creditor–debtor relation and reveals it as control over the means of production, institutional credit, crops, and future income.

Here the "net" is not merely a deceitful predicament: it is a configuration of power that progressively closes off alternatives.

The moneylender does not simply pressure Shyam Babu to clear his arrears; he converts debt into social subordination. Consequently, as soon as the question of Barsā's marriage arises, the ledger of debt, ownership of fields, and the prospect of dowry come together. In Suidchan's imagination the debtor's daughter becomes a means of transferring property before she is recognised as a person capable of marriage. Within that calculation of dowry, Shyam Babu's fields would pass to the very family that has already foreclosed his economic future through moneylending interest. This is the title's sharpest irony: the family presented as a source of security is itself the instrument of subjugation.

The clerk plays an important role in this arrangement. Examining ledgers, calculating the burden of interest, advising that an opponent be punished as an example to others, and endorsing his master's violent decisions all indicate his active participation. *Jāl* does not merely portray one oppressive individual; it shows an alliance of bookkeeping, the cudgel, fear, social prestige, and purported protection that sustains him. There is no need to treat this as an exhaustive documentary account of a wider social reality: the alliance is sufficiently evident within the work itself.

From an economic perspective, it is notable that the crisis of crops "not yielding" is not represented as the consequence of individual idleness. Vikram himself says that he began earning a living by selling milk because the fields produced no harvest. Shyam Babu, too, faces the uncertainty of agricultural income and the pressure of educational expenses. Under such conditions, instability of production intensifies economic dependence, and the moneylender turns that dependence into social and sexual-political control. The screenplay's contemporary significance lies in its disclosure of this causal relationship.

5. River, Boat, and Train: The Visual Politics of Rural Geography

In *Jāl*, the river is not merely a picturesque background. The villages, schools, college, market, post office, railway, and possibilities of employment on either side of the river divide geography into unequal opportunities. Vikram crosses the river to sell milk; Barsā crosses to study; their paths meet on the boat. The boat thus becomes a shared platform of social mobility and accidental contact. Because the emergence of love is bound to the everyday journeys of rural people, narrative and place become mutually dependent.

The hurry to reach the opposite bank, the bicycle bell, the boatman's admonition, Barsā's displeasure, and Vikram's awkward humour give the river scene several layers. Within a single visual space, the time of labour, youthful impulse, and a woman's bodily boundaries collide. The boat is small and the passengers numerous; the likelihood of accidental touch and unwanted intervention rises. To call the scene simply "love at first sight" would diminish its social subtlety.

The crowded river crossing: books, milk cans, labour, and the first encounter

A meaningful asymmetry emerges between the river crossing and the train's departure. The boat carries villagers across to meet everyday needs; the train takes Vikram out of the village towards employment. The first journey is recurrent, the second potentially a decisive transformation of life. Barsā runs after the train and a horse comes after her: this image could have united motion, opportunity, love, and pursuing domination into a powerful composition. Yet because Barsā's actual route from this scene to the next remains unclear, the force of the image cannot become certainty in the plot.

6. Vikram: Labour, Education, and the Promise of the State

The social credibility of Vikram's character lies in his everyday routine at the beginning. He studies, loads milk cans on his bicycle and travels to town, posts an application at the post office, and remains bound by his mother's expectations. His relationship with his mother is tender but not unconditionally admiring. She understands economic uncertainty and fears her son's reckless defiance; concerned to protect her household, she advises him to keep away from criminal power. This conversation movingly expresses the perception of risk within a rural family of limited means.

Raghua's form of address, "daroga" (police officer), connects Vikram's childhood games with his future ambitions. When he was made the policeman in childhood games of thieves and police, the name remained a burden of expectation; later he resolves to turn that name into an actual profession. His declaration that he wishes to join the police in order to oppose injustice converts a personal affront into a social responsibility. The hope of entering a state institution, however, does not resolve the moral complications of his immediate

resistance. How would becoming a policeman make justice possible within the very institutional order that is said to be subject to Suidchan's influence? The screenplay does not develop this compelling question sufficiently.

Vikram's rescue of Barsā is a heroic scene, but it is not a construction in which "a lone hero does everything." Labourers working in the fields arrive carrying sickles and sticks, and the criminals then flee. Collective intervention is therefore indispensable to the narrative's decisive resistance. Here lies the seed of popular solidarity, which could have been cultivated continuously in subsequent scenes. At this point the work opens the possibility of moving beyond a hero-centred outlook.

The letter offering Vikram employment constitutes the screenplay's formal turning point. The reader expects that his earlier aspiration towards social justice will now be put to the test; he leaves for training or service. Yet within the events presented, neither his training, appointment, nor return appears. Vikram's character is consequently strongly established but left dramatically incomplete. Incompleteness is not necessarily a flaw in itself; nevertheless, when the narrative establishes its protagonist's principal moral resolve through a public declaration, an expectation of its consequences naturally arises.

7. Barsā: Love, Education, and the Restriction of Autonomy

Barsā first enters as a young woman walking briskly towards the river with a book in her hand. This introduction gives her the social identity of an active student. On the boat she declines unnecessary help and boards by herself; she expresses displeasure when Vikram touches her without consent; when they meet again at the post office in a later scene, she picks up her book herself. These small actions give her personality an independent outline. To be the heroine of a romance does not necessarily make her a character who accepts a man's overtures.

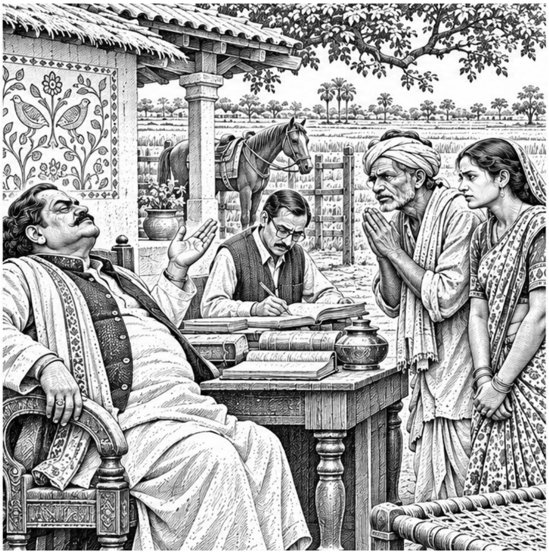
After the attempted abduction, Barsā informs her father of what happened. He hears her distress, but the pressures of family honour, rumour, and an "appropriate" marriage soon take precedence over his social judgment. Trusting Suidchan's supposed protection, the father himself exposes his daughter to the most dangerous relationship. The poignant element here is not that the father does not love his daughter; rather, despite his affection, he lacks sufficient insight into the relations of power to keep her safe.

Barsā also clearly resists the objection based on caste. Her father regards Vikram as someone outside their caste community; against this argument, Barsā recalls Vikram's actual protection and goodwill. Love here becomes more than sentiment: it becomes a moral judgment grounded in experience, placing the qualities of the person who protected her above caste distance. Her father nevertheless prevents her from going beyond the house and courtyard. This confinement sharply contrasts with the young woman's initial freedom of movement as she crossed the river for education.

In the latter part, Barsā receives a letter and is shown running after a train during preparations for marriage; thereafter her whereabouts remain unknown. These actions can be read as signs of a bold assertion of love, but the story does not identify a safe alternative for her, the clarity of her decision, or the course of her subsequent journey. At precisely this point, although women's agency remains central to the narrative, it becomes a casualty of narrative indeterminacy. What does Barsā want, and what consequences follow from her choices? These remain important questions.

8. Shyam Babu: The Sympathetic Father and Agent of Domination

It would be inadequate to regard Shyam Babu simply as a weak or reactionary father. He is an educated man, the income from his fields is insufficient, his debt is growing, and the absence of his wife also produces an emotional distance in his exchanges with his daughter. When danger threatens her he becomes anxious and wishes to punish the offender, but seeks advice from Suidchan. The reader encounters a significant contradiction: the man whose economic power he fears is the very man he treats as a source of moral protection.



The ledger of dependence: Suidchan, Shyam Babu, and Barsā

In the conversation of the twenty-sixth scene, Shyam Babu initially attempts to ask his daughter's opinion; Suidchan signals that he should remain silent. The silence signifies not only one father's defeat but the public grammar of rural domination, in which economic dependency also deprives a person of the right to speak. Later, Shyam Babu disciplines his daughter under pressure from caste and prestige; thus a man who suffers oppression becomes in turn an agent of patriarchy. This double role gives the work greater psychological depth.

After his daughter disappears, Shyam Babu questions himself before the sun: is the fault his or his daughter's? This is one of the narrative's distinctive moments of pathos. He is caught between the laughter of society, the absence of his wife, and his sense of paternal duty. In this scene self-reproach is more powerful than argument. Yet the sympathetic presentation does not absolve Shyam Babu of his earlier decisions. The play's moral force lies precisely in the contradiction that a loving father may nevertheless sustain a system of injustice.

9. Hariya: Caste Protection, Sexual Entitlement, and Impunity

Hariya is the violent extension of Suidchan's economic domination. His horse, threats involving weapons, criminal companions, drinking, and insulting attack on Vikram's mother's home establish his social identity. Particularly noteworthy is that he restrains his own men from violence against Barsā on grounds of shared caste, while regarding Vikram as an enemy. In this division, women's safety is not a universal moral principle but a restricted form of protection defined by caste and possession.

Hariya's attraction towards Barsā gradually becomes a claim of entitlement. On seeing Barsā's love song his anger intensifies; he threatens violence before Vikram's mother. Suidchan converts this personal desire into an opportunity for acquiring property. The ethical vocabulary of love and marriage is absent from the relationship between father and son; in its place stand entitlement, the suppression of a rival, and calculations of profit. For this reason, although Hariya is individually a villain, he also embodies the institutional character of an exploitative household.

On learning of Phuliya's pregnancy, Hariya orders her to break off relations with him and to terminate the pregnancy; he threatens to kill her if necessary. Distinct from the moral and legal questions surrounding pregnancy or its termination, the centre of this scene is the violent control exercised over a woman's decision. Phuliya makes her own decision about her pregnancy, while Hariya seeks to suppress her will. The man's irresponsible sexual conduct and evasion of responsibility expose as hypocritical that family's public rhetoric about marriage and honour.

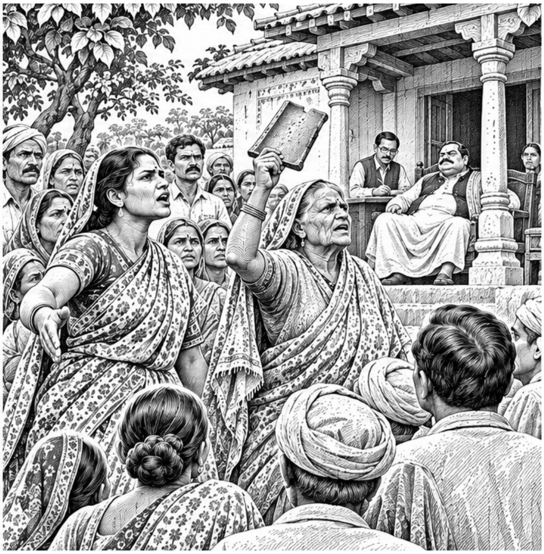
10. Phuliya and Chanki: From Private Humiliation to Public Resistance

One of the most meaningful developments in the latter part of *Jāl* concerns Phuliya's pregnancy and Chanki's anger. Phuliya reveals the truth to her mother; her household is itself struggling with material deprivation, her father's drinking, and domestic conflict. She comes home in tears amid a shortage of food and demands for money to buy liquor. Sexual exploitation thus emerges not as an isolated event but as a crisis arising within the accumulated insecurity of an impoverished household.

Chanki's response initially employs the language of "honour": she speaks of using public disgrace to compel Hariya to marry her daughter. This cannot simply be described as an unqualified victory of progressive autonomy. To regard

marriage as the only remedy is not to escape the patriarchal social values that placed Phuliya in difficulty in the first place. Chanki's significance nevertheless lies in her refusal to accept frightened silence: she turns the weapon of social shame against the exploiter.

In the thirty-eighth scene, Chanki, Phuliya, and the people of their hamlet arrive at Suidchan's gate. The moneylender and his clerk threaten the protestors; Chanki confronts them directly. A roof tile that she throws strikes Suidchan on the forehead. The action symbolically reverses power: the body of a man whose household had monopolised sticks and fear is wounded by an ordinary woman's resistance. The moneylender's injury does not end exploitation, but it certainly strikes at the supposed invulnerability of his monopoly.



Phuliya and Chanki: a women-led challenge to the moneylender's power

Shyam Babu witnesses this public protest. He hears disclosures about Hariya's conduct and his household, and then departs in a mood of remorse. This scene creates an important bridge between the first and second stories. The father who considered the moneylender a safe protector for his daughter now sees the injustice of that household made public. Yet the narrative shows no subsequent action arising from Shyam Babu's recognition; its strongest moral disclosure consequently fails to arrive at a dramatic resolution.

11. Caste, Property, and Marriage: Interwoven Forms of Domination

In *Jāl*, caste is not merely the final obstacle to marriage. Hariya invokes shared caste as his reason for forbidding his associates from attacking Barsā; Shyam Babu excludes Vikram from his own caste community; Suidchan seeks to secure economic ties through a marriage that would make Barsā his daughter-in-law. Caste here disciplines a woman's wishes and becomes a means of regulating the

movement of property. The text, however, does not provide the precise caste names of the characters; assigning them to particular caste communities would therefore exceed the bounds of a study of this work.

In Ambedkar's critique of caste, control over marriage is counted among the fundamental means of preserving caste. *Jāl* gives this larger question a particular narrative form: the morality of Barsā's love is not assessed independently of caste eligibility, and marriage to the moneylender's son is virtually imposed as an unavoidable social decision. This is, however, a critical parallel rather than historical evidence; to derive conclusions about the entirety of Mithila society from one incident in a literary work would not meet the demands of research.

The intersection of property, caste, and the woman's choice in marriage is clearest in Suidchan's fantasy of dowry. He had been planning to seize the fields in exchange for the debt, but now sees an easier gain through his son's marriage. Within this scheme Barsā is not a person with wishes of her own but a vehicle for transferring property. The strength of the social analysis is that economic exploitation and gendered domination do not stand in separate chapters: they become a single, conjoint process within one scene.

12. Scene Construction: Moving Images, "Cut To," and Temporal Shifts

One merit of the screenplay is the simplicity of its scene directions. Information about time, place, and the characters is usually given before a scene begins. The river, the household entrance, the post office, a deserted stretch of farmland, the moneylender's veranda, the railway station, and Phuliya's home are all visually recognisable locations. The bicycle wheel, milk can, lantern, horse, letter, roof tile, and ledger are tangible objects useful to cinema. Through these objects the story moves beyond an abstraction of feeling.

The repeated use of "cut to" in moving from one scene to the next connects the writing with the conventional notation of film. Yet repeating the same cue for every transition does not automatically increase the semantic density of editing. The movement from the moneylender's discussion of accounts to the crisis confronting Vikram and Barsā, for example, carries narrative meaning; in certain other places, however, the love song, waiting, and repeated solitude add comparatively little new information. An editing cue matters when the order of scenes changes the spectator's knowledge, apprehension, or understanding of relationships.

Immediately after their first encounter on the boat, Vikram's dream song is introduced with the indication "flashback." Chronologically, it seems closer to an immediate fantasy or mental image than to recollection of the past. Such scenes require a clearer distinction among memory, dream, and the image of desire. The later scene in which Hariya stops his horse and recalls an earlier encounter more closely resembles a genuine recollection. Employing the same cue for two different kinds of narrative time weakens the consistency of the visual language.

The construction of scenes offers several opportunities to convey psychological information rather than continually "telling" it: Barsā's lowered eyes, Shyam Babu's silence, the waiting of Vikram's mother, and Phuliya weeping in a corner. These indications render the characters' emotional states performable. Here the screenplay's effects extend beyond ordinary dialogue. But when Hariya and Suidchan repeatedly proclaim their own villainy, visual suggestion yields to explanatory declaration.

13. Sound, Folk Milieu, and the Symbolism of Objects

In the first scene, the boatman's song emerges as the communal voice of a river-centred way of life. Later, the temple bell, sound from the mosque, crowing cock, bicycle bell, and noise of domestic courtyards lend density to the aural setting. The society of the story is not merely seen; it is also heard. Rural sounds and movement along the road to town, in particular, establish the rhythm of everyday time in the region. Compared with this natural soundscape, the dream song connects the narrative with a familiar convention of popular cinema.

The milk can may be read as a material sign of earnings through labour; the ledger, of debt; the horse, of domination; the letter, of hope and decision; and the roof tile, of protest. These symbolic meanings, however, emerge from the objects' actual functions in the action, not from any claim that the writer has deliberately assigned a fixed symbol to each one. Particularly in the thirty-eighth scene, Chanki's roof tile changes from an ordinary domestic object into an act of resistance to power—a transformation of literary significance.

14. The Social Registers of Dialogue: Humour, Fear, and Moral Protest

The exchanges between Raghua and Vikram are marked by affection and banter. The address "daroga," the request to stop the bicycle, and the humorous demand for a "bribe" to deliver a letter bring lively local speech into a tense narrative. The shopkeeper's dialogue displays commercial familiarity and Vikram's self-respect. These exchanges possess the spontaneity of folk life because the characters speak in ways appropriate to their work, relationships, and circumstances. The work's linguistic achievement lies principally in such minor episodes.

Threats, insults, and the language of possession dominate the speeches of Suidchan, Hariya, and the clerk. Shyam Babu's language is marked by hesitation, uncertainty, and social fear; Vikram's mother speaks with domestic concern and the caution learned from experience; Chanki's voice is full of thunder and anger. Such differences give the characters distinct social voices. Yet several speeches from the moneylender's side are excessively explicit: they openly announce the purposes of their conspiracy. In a realist screenplay, allowing some meanings to emerge through gesture, the consequences of circumstances, and indirect suggestion could have intensified the tension.

The conversation between Vikram and his mother in the fifteenth scene occupies the moral centre of the entire work. She warns that confronting a wealthy

criminal may cost him his life; he refuses to remain silent in the face of injustice. Both positions are true to experience: on one side is self-preservation, on the other moral resistance. This conflict is not a simple opposition between "good" and "bad" characters, but a difficult social choice between risk and justice. The larger political significance of the work appears most concentratedly in this exchange.

15. Community: From Frightened Spectators to Active Resistance

The village community does not have a uniform presence in the narrative. People on the boat help Barsā board; labourers in the fields rush to prevent an abduction; a messenger heightens Vikram's mother's fear by telling her of an incident; people gathered at a wedding household take part in social ceremonies; and, finally, the people of the hamlet accompany Chanki to the moneylender's entrance. These groups perform different functions: assistance, protective intervention, the circulation of rumours, adherence to custom, and protest. This variation challenges the tendency to regard rural society merely as a passive crowd.

An internal relationship can be discerned between collective resistance in the twelfth and thirty-eighth scenes. In the first, labourers prevent a physical assault; in the second, people led by women demand public accountability. Had the writer developed this communal dimension continuously, a broader social narrative might have taken shape in place of individualistic heroism. As it stands, the possibility appears in effective individual scenes, not as a fully developed movement.

16. Women's Perspectives and the Contradictions of "Honour"

The word "honour," as applied to women in the narrative, acquires a different social meaning on each occasion. In the attempted abduction of Barsā, it concerns safety and protection from violence; in Shyam Babu's view, talk about his daughter threatens to diminish the family's public standing; in Phuliya's household, it attaches to the social pressures surrounding pregnancy and marriage. These varying uses make clear that society often measures women's experience against the scale of family prestige, apart from their own wishes.

Laura Mulvey's critique of the visual objectification of women helps distinguish the gazes directed at Barsā by Vikram, Hariya, and the village. Vikram's initially fascinated gaze belongs to pleasure; Hariya's to entitlement; the gaze of rumour-spreading society becomes a means of discipline. Barsā's objections and Chanki's public anger interrupt this regime of looking. Nevertheless, by ultimately leaving the heroine's situation unspecified, the screenplay keeps open the question of how far the authority to decide has actually shifted towards the woman.

In Phuliya's case, unnecessary moral simplification of the question of pregnancy should be avoided. The crisis does not lie in the mere mention of terminating a pregnancy, but in Hariya's threats and his attempt to deprive Phuliya of the right

to make a personal decision. Chanki demands marriage, but there is no independent examination of Phuliya's long-term safety, consent, or wishes. Had the work dwelt more fully on these matters, its conception of justice for women could have moved beyond the conventional code of "restoring honour."

17. Structural Limitations: Characters, Numbering, and Outcome

A concrete inconsistency of relationships occurs between the character introduction to *Jāl* and its later scenes. In the initial introduction, Chanki is called Hariya's lover and Phuliya is described as Chanki's mother; in the latter part, Hariya's pregnant lover is named Phuliya and her mother Chanki. It would be unwarranted to treat this reversal automatically as a meaningful symbol or deliberate inversion. The discrepancy between names and relationships may confuse spectators, performers, and editors, and affects the screenplay's narrative consistency.

In the sequence of scenes, the fifteenth is numbered immediately after the thirteenth; the number fourteen is missing. This irregularity does not in itself diminish the worth of the subject matter, but when a screenplay serves as the common working text for production, performance, and editing, accuracy in the scene list becomes a condition of practical use. Characters such as Mandev, Rakhiya, and Bhakolbā are introduced in the opening list, but their active narrative roles are not clearly developed in the available succession of scenes. One should not invent conjectural directions for possible subplots on that basis.

In the first part, the meeting of Vikram and Barsā, the aspiration to employment, and the moneylender's net grow progressively more intense; in the final part, the conflict involving Phuliya and Chanki takes centre stage. The latter conflict enriches the first story's social meaning, but their combined outcome remains incomplete in terms of the causal relationships among scenes. Barsā's whereabouts, Vikram's future, Shyam Babu's decision, Phuliya's demand, and Hariya's accountability all remain undecided in the last available scene. The internal artistic indications required to identify this uncertainty confidently as a deliberately open ending are not sufficiently clear.

These limitations do not invalidate the work's social observation. Its successful scenes—the milk trade, the hurried boarding of the boat, the ledger, the labourers' rescue, Shyam Babu's silence, and Chanki's challenge—are each vivid in their own right. Yet the screenplay is also a unified work of action: the effects of its episodes become lasting when earlier resolutions, central crises, and the consequences of decisions develop in relation to one another. Aristotle's conception of a unified action and modern theories of screenplay structure express this expectation in different terms.

18. Evaluation of Genre: The Literary Text and the Possibility of Performance

In reading a screenplay, both the literary qualities of its dialogue and the practicalities of performance must be considered. In *Jāl*, brief indications of location and action establish possibilities for enactment. The river landing, bicycle, galloping horse, and collective gatherings are means of generating visual impact. At the same time, recurring group songs, journeys on horseback, and scenes of running after a moving train may demand considerable staging expense or complex production arrangements. Such practical matters are not alternatives to artistic worth, but additional criteria for evaluating the screenplay's performability.

The Indian dramatic tradition contains extensive reflection on enactment, situation, emotion, and spectators' experience. The pathetic episodes in *Jāl*—Shyam Babu's remorse and Phuliya's weeping—and its episodes of wrath—Hariya's threats and Chanki's confrontation—establish different emotional registers. Merely naming these emotions, however, does not warrant declaring that the work fully realises *rasa*. That requires the combined examination of character development, the duration of scenes, moral consequences, and the experience of the audience. In this sense, *Jāl* moves between the emotional possibilities of traditional drama and the rapid incident-driven structure of popular cinema.

The work's language is a living vehicle for local social relationships. The differing idioms of household and threshold, father and daughter, moneylender and clerk, and hamlet and community give the composition its voices. This locality is not decoration alone but a source of meaning. The humour of the address "daroga," for example, is linked to Vikram's ambition; the word "honour" to the social destinies of Barsā and Phuliya; and the "net" to the moneylender's confidence. This density of language is the author's most credible creative resource.

19. Conclusion

The central achievement of Rajdev Mandal's *Jāl* is that, within a popular narrative of love and crime, it displays the mutually reinforcing structures of rural economy, caste regulation, interference with women's desires, and moneylending violence. The writer's visual talent is particularly apparent in the concrete images of work, movement, and domestic life. Vikram's education and labour, Barsā's independent temperament, Shyam Babu's internal conflict, Suidchan's economic calculations, and Chanki's public resistance together form the foundation of a social narrative with several centres of force.

Alongside these achievements, certain limitations are clear. An excessively conventional use of scene transitions, unclear indications distinguishing remembered past from fantasy, inconsistencies in the names and relationships of characters, irregular numbering, insufficient use of characters established at the

beginning, and unresolved outcomes of the central conflicts all obstruct the unity of the screenplay's craft. The purpose of criticism is not to conceal these limitations, but to show how a firmer organisation of action could enhance the impact of questions whose social urgency is so marked.

Ultimately, to regard *Jāl* merely as a story of Vikram's heroism or Barsā's love would diminish its outward-reaching social significance. Its most thought-provoking moment occurs when Chanki gathers people at the moneylender's veranda to demand an answer for injustice. This resistance to the net does not bring complete liberation, but it certainly challenges the monopoly of fear. The work's significance lies in the question it leaves before the reader: when debt, caste, family, and violence bind and reinforce one another, whose courage, what collective action, and which decisions can make justice possible?

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Lāj: Women's Education, Class Power, and Moral Recognition

A Text-Centred Dramatic Critique and Sociocultural Study

Abstract

Rajdev Mandal's *Lāj* is a rural social one-act play written in support of women's education, but its critical significance is not confined to the exhortation to "educate daughters." The play depicts changes in relations of power among the public school, the family, landed dominance, women's voices, and, ultimately, medical service. At the outset, the unspoken meaning of *lāj*—shame—is bound up with society's surveillance of a daughter and anxiety about family honour; by the end, the same word names the moral self-recognition of the oppressor. This study examines the sequence of nine scenes, the social registers of dialogue, the theatrical signs conveyed by silence and costume, the long interval of time, the teacher's contrasting representations, the role of familial assistance, and the problem of a forgiving conclusion. It separately investigates the tension between the unified action of a one-act play and its extended arrangement of scenes. The theoretical perspectives of educational discourse, the capability approach, cultural reproduction, and dramatic recognition are employed as instruments of comparative interpretation, not as claims of direct influence upon the work. The study concludes that *Lāj* achieves its greatest effect through a reversal of moral value; its limitations emerge in the personal nature of its resolution, the polarisation of its characters, and its rapid reconciliation with institutional injustice.

Keywords: Rajdev Mandal; *Lāj*; Maithili one-act drama; Savitā; women's education; class power; social drama; recognition.

1. Introduction: Not the Play's Subject but Its Question

The plot of *Lāj* appears straightforward. Savitā, the daughter of Haricharan, a poor village farmer, expresses a desire to study; a teacher's intervention gains her admission to school; Bhogendra, son of the wealthy Kulānand, humiliates and assaults her; she subsequently pursues her education in the city, becomes a physician, and saves that same Bhogendra's life. Yet three questions of social legitimacy operate simultaneously within this narrative: who will have the opportunity to study, who will make the decision, and who should feel shame after an offence has been committed? The interrelation of these questions carries the one-act play beyond a simple moral injunction.

In an introductory comment, the playwright explains that he undertook the writing of the one-act play at the request of people eager to perform a drama; he also modestly acknowledges his lack of practice. This statement may be taken as evidence of the work's performance-oriented origins, but it would be improper to treat it as evidence of an actual performance, an audience response, or a

history of staging. The author's comment is dated 14 January 2015; it is likewise unjustified to assume that this date is the year of publication.

The method of this study is primarily text-centred: scenes, utterances, characters' conduct, dramatic intervals, and the language of the ending are read in relation to one another. At a second level, literary histories of Maithili one-act drama and social discussions of education are brought to bear. External theory serves as an instrument for understanding the play's events; it is neither the playwright's declared purpose nor an identified source of study nor an obligatory intellectual genealogy. Maintaining this distinction safeguards the work's own language and its particular rural circumstances.

2. Maithili Dramatic Tradition and the Generic Position of *Lāj*

Modern Maithili playwriting has a long history of engagement with social questions, linguistic consciousness, and changes in theatrical form. Devakanta Jha's history of modern Maithili literature devotes separate consideration to drama. Contemporary scholarship has read Raghunandana Das's *Mithilānāṭaka* in the context of debates over linguistic and cultural identity, and Brij Bihari Lal Mandal's *Mithila Natak* as a neglected social voice within literary history. One point emerges clearly from these diverse histories: to regard Maithili drama either solely as an elite literary form or solely as local entertainment is, in either case, a restrictive view.

In his discussion of the one-act play, Hira Mandal emphasises a single principal action, a limited number of characters, and concision of dialogue. Judged by these criteria, *Lāj* presents an interesting exception. The work calls itself a one-act play, but it comprises nine scenes, several settings—including home, school, the landlord's courtyard, village square, and hospital—and a temporal span extending from childhood into adulthood. Its unity resides not in the compression of time or place but in the continuity of the central conflict arising from the right to education. The designation "one-act play," in other words, does not of itself make a work's structure short or compressed.

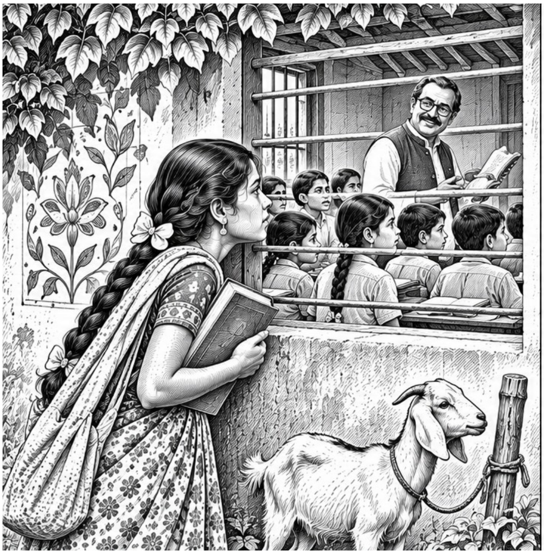
The play's craft depends upon spoken dialogue and brief stage directions. The fall of the curtain separates its scenes and allows the audience to witness successive phases of a life. It is therefore more precise to describe *Lāj* as a multi-scene social one-act play organised around a single action. This classification describes its form; it does not certify artistic achievement. The succession of scenes makes the central conflict effective, but dramatic intensity also slackens at intervals.

3. The Structure of Nine Scenes: From Initial Prohibition to Final Acceptance

The first scene begins at Haricharan's home. Savitā is absent; her father and mother speak about her. The father insists on disciplining his daughter because of the village's prevailing "atmosphere," while Chanpaṭīvālī expresses confidence in the family's character. This absence generates the play's initial irony: the person whose future is at stake has not yet expressed her wishes in her own voice.

The girl first becomes an object of "lineage" and "honour"; she becomes an individual only later.

The second scene reveals the school's double aspect. Teachers discuss unreasonable demands for dowry but neglect supervision of their classes; a ploughman exposes the contradiction. Against this background, Savitā ties up her goat and watches the lesson through a window. The window is no ordinary architectural object: it gives visible form to the boundary between the school's inside and outside, between opportunity and its denial, between curiosity and entitlement. Savitā's plea, "Let me study too," is her first direct intervention at that boundary.



Savitā at the school window: curiosity confronted by a barrier to education

The third scene opens with the arrival of the teacher Shyām Babu at the family home. Haricharan asks about his son's studies; the teacher shifts the discussion to his daughter's abilities. The father repeatedly cites household work, social accusations, and economic hardship. His wife supports the teacher's proposal. The right to education is not secured in a single stroke: parental permission takes shape only through the obstacles of social anxiety, domestic labour, and limited means.

The fourth scene shows Savitā's quick intelligence and diligence in the classroom; Bhogendra challenges and mocks her. The fifth shows the consequences of Bhogendra's beating of Savitā—torn clothing, tears, and her father's helplessness. In the sixth, the complaint reaches Kulānand's courtyard, where his social dominance carries more weight than an impartial inquiry. The seventh scene opens an alternative route to schooling through her maternal uncle's household. In the eighth, a substantial leap forward in time presents

Savitā as a physician and Bhogendra as a young man made ill by drinking. The ninth concludes with medical treatment, remorse, and a request for forgiveness. The sequence chooses public usefulness and moral reversal rather than revenge.

4. The Title's Semantic Journey: From Surveillance and Shame to Accountability

The most powerful artistic device in *Lāj* is the changing meaning of the word in its title. Within the initial domestic setting, shame is connected not to an individual's moral wrongdoing but to the fear that outsiders, seeing a daughter move about independently, might level accusations against her. Haricharan's anxiety is not merely parental caution; it also arises from a social gaze that makes a girl's departure from the house an occasion for control. This deeply rooted fear is subsequently corroborated by an actual act of violence, so that the father's apprehension acquires a partially experiential basis as well.

At the conclusion, Kulānand admits that he feels ashamed to face Savitā. Within the same society, the burden of *lāj* is transferred from the oppressed girl to the powerful man who sheltered injustice. Herein lies the title's ethical edge: shame is detached from the female body and family prestige and restored to the domain of responsibility for wrongdoing. The man who had earlier ended discussion by invoking his land and social standing now bows beneath the memory of his offence.

The change is nevertheless not unproblematic. Does Kulānand's final shame signify genuine moral transformation, or gratitude imposed upon him by the person who saved his son's life? The text leaves this question open. Kulānand offers society a lesson, but nothing in the dramatic action takes the form of actual reparation for his earlier wrongdoing, protection for Savitā at school, or institutional reform. The conceptual achievement of the title and the incompleteness of the process of justice must therefore be read together.

5. Savitā's Character: Curiosity, Resistance, and the Complexity of Service

Savitā's first decisive action is to speak from the other side of the window. She presents her wish to study as a direct demand, not as the petition of someone seeking charity. The teacher asks her the sum of five and five; she answers at once. This brief exchange serves as theatrical proof of her ability, but it does not imply that only exceptionally intelligent girls deserve an education. The narrative use of Savitā's aptitude and the inalienable right of every girl are two distinct standards.

At school, Savitā outperforms others in solving a problem and speaks openly against Bhogendra's indiscipline. Her response demonstrates her capacity to speak for herself; she is not simply a silent victim. Yet that resistance is met with physical violence. The text establishes resistance as admirable without erasing its social risks. Confidence generated by education and a struggle against unequal power appear together on stage.

Savitā's becoming a physician constitutes a guiding moral outcome. Her superiority is established neither by humiliating Bhogendra nor by refusing to treat him: she provides medical care. Through this act, the one-act play presents an idea of education directed towards the common good. Nevertheless, the actual labour of Savitā's higher education, her struggles within institutions, professional training, and decision-making processes are not given dramatic form. The narrative crosses the longest period between her girlhood and her medical career in a single leap. The outcome is effective; the process remains invisible.

The final scene makes Savitā the moral centre of forgiveness and healing. Her independence within this position, however, is qualified. She fulfils her professional responsibility, obtains Bhogendra's promise to abstain from alcohol, and seeks the blessings of the villagers. The plot gives her no dialogue about her inner hurt, anger, or the future of her relationships. In making a woman's moral generosity its dramatic climax, the play compresses the complexity of that woman's experience. This is an important critical limitation of the one-act play.

6. Haricharan and Chanpaṭīvālī: Dissent within Patriarchy

To dismiss Haricharan merely as a father opposed to education would diminish his complexity. Initially he fears his daughter's independent movement, but after she is assaulted at school, the reasons for his powerlessness become apparent to everyone. His concern is not restricted to fear of social criticism; he is acutely aware of the limited power available to protect a poor person's child. He tells the teacher that, if she continues to study, such an incident might recur. This certainly amounts to a failure to safeguard her education, but it is also a response to the absence of social protection.

At first Chanpaṭīvālī trusts in the family's good name, but in the teacher's presence she supports the decision to send her daughter to school. Her agreement also emerges in the seventh scene when Savitā is to be sent to her maternal uncle's household. The name by which this character is known indicates a social position: the woman appears through an identity associated with her marital relationship rather than through a personal name, whereas her daughter "Savitā" gains recognition through her own name and actions. The contrast may serve as a subtle linguistic sign of generational change in the plot; nevertheless, there is no independent declaration of the writer's intention in naming her "Chanpaṭīvālī."

The play does not treat the family as a uniform authority. The father's hesitation, the mother's support, the teacher's insistence, and Savitā's own desire become distinct voices. Their convergence favours education. Yet although the girl's wishes remain central, her father grants the final permission for admission. The device reveals the possibility of transforming patriarchy, not its immediate abolition.

7. Education: Rights, Institutional Contradictions, and the Dignity of Labour

The school's first appearance is satirical. While the teachers express indignation at demands for dowry, they neglect their ordinary responsibility to teach. A pupil arrives with a complaint but receives a reprimand. The ploughman objects to their neglect of instruction and cites the responsible conduct of his agricultural work as an example. Here the play devises an engaging reversal between authority founded upon books and an ethics founded upon labour: the worker, considered inferior in the school's formal hierarchy, teaches the teacher a lesson in duty.

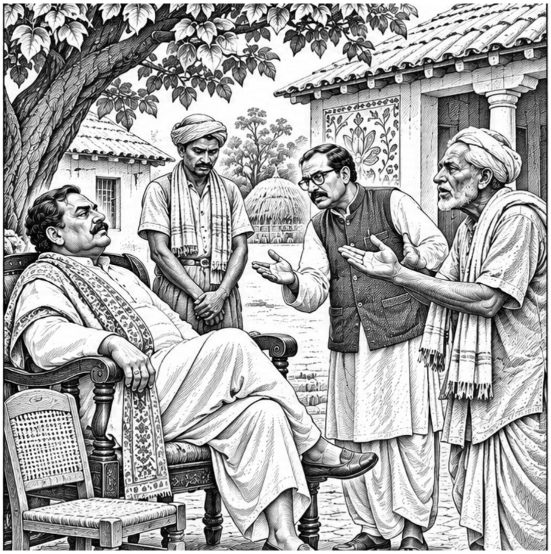
Within the same institution, Shyām Babu represents a positive possibility. He recognises Savitā's talent, visits her parents to reason with them, and attempts to speak with Kulānand after the assault. Other teachers at the school, meanwhile, strike pupils with a cane and use humiliating comparisons. Thus, the school is not inherently an institution of liberation in the play: it becomes inclusive through the intervention of a committed teacher and exclusionary through violent forms of discipline. Its moral assessment emerges from the contrast between Shyām Babu's humane initiative and his colleagues' harshness.

India's Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, establishes children's right of access to schooling; Section 17 prohibits physical punishment and mental harassment. The presence in the drama of both the opportunity to study and violence within the school makes a meaningful comparison with these principles possible. The text, however, does not specify the characters' precise ages, and it would therefore be unwarranted to determine by conjecture which particular provisions of the Act apply to which characters.

Paulo Freire's dialogic pedagogy and bell hooks's discussion of teaching as a practice of freedom provide a context for reading this contradiction: an educational institution does not simply transfer knowledge; it also establishes recognition of the student's voice. Shyām Babu's readiness to hear Savitā's wish is decisive in precisely this sense. The teacher's positive representation is nonetheless not a complete ideal. His efforts depend upon personal mediation; the school develops no institutional system of accountability.

8. Kulānand's Courtyard: The Power of Land, Seating, and Speech

In the stage setting of the sixth scene, Kulānand sits on a chair in his courtyard, with an old seat nearby. He orders the labourer Bisekhī to bring a chair; after providing it, Bisekhī remains standing. In this action, the equation of power is established without an explanatory speech. Who may sit, who must stand, who may speak, and who must listen: the social order is conveyed through objects and the disposition of bodies. This moment is among the play's most densely meaningful visual signs.



Kulānand's courtyard: unequal seating, landed authority, and the labourer's standing place

As soon as Kulānand hears of his son's misconduct, he turns the complaint against the girl, attributing it to her "waywardness." He claims that the school was built upon his land. His assertion of control over the school's physical foundation conflicts with the ethical, public character of education. Landownership, social prestige, and the defence of wrongdoing are entangled; the school's structure of authority appears vulnerable to landed influence from outside it.

Bisekhī is a labourer, but his role is not confined to that of a resisting voice. He explains the gravity of Savitā's condition, yet also expresses a disciplinary attitude akin to the notion that children should be driven into line. This contradiction lends the character credibility: membership of an oppressed class does not guarantee complete freedom from social hierarchies. His hesitant speech and partial agreement before his employer reveal the complexity of conduct shaped by power.

Bourdieu and Passeron's account of cultural reproduction in education provides one theoretical basis for reading this scene. The play, however, does not clearly establish caste identities or particular social categories; it would therefore be contrary to the evidence to assign castes to characters on the basis of their surnames or occupations. The opposition explicitly grounded in the text concerns economic standing, the position of labour, and the influence of landownership.

9. The Indirect Representation of Violence and Savitā's Torn Clothes

Bhogendra's beating of Savitā is not itself shown on stage. When the fifth scene opens, her clothing is torn, she is crying, and her father questions the teacher.

The theatrical focus falls not upon the bodily enactment of the incident but upon its consequences. The stage directions convey her suffering to the audience, while Haricharan's words interpret that suffering as grounds for denying her the right to education.

The torn garment is a multilayered sign. At one level it is immediate evidence of violence; at another, a visible mark of a girl's social vulnerability; at a third, the father associates it with regret over his decision to have her educated. But the garment is not itself a cause for shame: the shame belongs to the violence that tore it and to the protection afforded that violence. The reinterpretation of the title at this point moves against the historically entrenched tendency to make the female body a bearer of shame.

This technique also possesses artistic strength. Rather than restaging the violence, it presents the victim's condition and society's response. Yet the absence of an extended independent soliloquy or dialogue for Savitā causes her suffering to be interpreted through her father's anxiety and the teacher's intervention. The audience sees her injuries but hears relatively little of her subsequent inner struggle.

10. The Temporal Interval, the Tree as Metaphor, and Social Memory

Between the seventh and eighth scenes, a long interval passes within the story. At the village square, the villagers observe how a tree has grown and remark that the former pupils of their school have become young adults. Through the tree, the passage of time acquires a visible symbol. The events of childhood have not been erased: their memory has continued to grow like the tree itself. When the villagers speak of Savitā's becoming a physician, the audience understands that education has borne fruit during the years withheld from direct dramatic presentation.

The opposing direction of this image emerges with Bhogendra's reappearance. The tree has grown; Savitā has grown; but Bhogendra's conduct has not attained moral maturity. His drinking brings him into crisis. This parallel construction permits a comparison between education and responsibility, but treating alcohol as the sole cause of a person's failure and schooling as the sole cause of success would accept the play's moral simplification without necessary critical distance.

The dramatic advantage of the time jump is pace; its cost is the invisibility of process. Savitā's transfer to another school, higher education, entry into medical service, and attainment of social standing comprise a many-layered journey the play leaves the audience to supply. If the plot's purpose is to show a moral outcome, such compression is effective; if the purpose is to analyse the historical and social difficulty of a woman's acquisition of independence, the compression excludes significant experience.

11. Inequality of Opportunity: Financial Support from Raghuvīr, the Maternal Uncle

The seventh scene is decisive in the play's moral arithmetic. Raghuvīr, Haricharan's brother-in-law, proposes taking Savitā with him so that she can help care for his pregnant and unwell wife. He promises to bear the cost of her education and arrange for her schooling in the city. Assistance and domestic service are connected here. An opportunity is offered, but behind it also lies an expectation of the girl's care work. This duality is a revealing sign of the play's social reality.

Savitā clearly consents, so it would be wrong to regard her merely as an object of exchange. The question nevertheless remains: how many opportunities would a girl without a financially capable maternal uncle have? The play depicts the obstacle posed by poverty but offers the private help of a benevolent relative in place of a structural solution. In the light of Nussbaum's capability approach, one may say that talent is not merely an individual attribute; a social arrangement that makes real alternatives available in life is also necessary.

At the end, villagers acknowledge that her maternal uncle's expenditure contributed to Savitā's achievement. Their comment corrects any father-centred claim to all the credit. The play recognises the importance of resources to success in education, but this very fact also discloses a limit to its ideal: equality of opportunity has not been established institutionally for all; it has been made personally available to one girl.

12. The Discussion of Dowry and the Limits of the Social Question

In the second scene, the teachers' conversation begins with demands for dowry. The list of coveted objects—a motorcycle, gold, and a laptop—shows how commodity value enters domestic life. The episode is not directly connected to the principal plot, but it provides a background for the mentality that treats a daughter's life as an expense, a source of anxiety, and a social burden. This discussion of dowry points to the wider environment of the economic and social obstacles Haricharan enumerates when opposing his daughter's education.

Within the structure of the work, the dowry discussion functions as a kind of thematic prelude. Its limitation is that the teachers' opposition to dowry does not subsequently become an active social campaign. The issue is introduced but not developed as a subplot. It would therefore be more accurate to regard it as an initial layer of social inequality affecting women than to call the work a fully developed drama about dowry.

13. The Vernacular Character of Dialogue, Satire, and Class-Inflected Voices

The language of *Lāj* draws upon the everyday rhythms of rural Maithili. Forms of address such as "yau," "māhṭar sāhaib," "bābū," "rau," and "chauṛī" enable the characters to increase or diminish social distance. Shyām Babu's persuasive tone, Haricharan's anxious replies, Kulānand's commanding speech, Bisekhī's

restrained objections, and Savitā's direct appeal together create an audible world of relationships. In many places the dialogue seems more natural when spoken on stage than when read from a printed page.

The ploughman's questioning of the teacher and the arrangement of seats in Kulānand's courtyard produce two distinct kinds of satire. In the first, the contradiction between an institution and the conduct of those entrusted with it generates comic irony; in the second, inequality of seating produces the tension of humiliation. In both cases, visible theatrical signs extend the meaning of dialogue.

In certain passages, however, the characters become vehicles for ideas. Shyām Babu offers what is almost a direct sermon on the equality of sons and daughters; at the close, Kulānand instructs society to support education. The message becomes explicit, but psychological complexity diminishes. Such didactic dialogue is compatible with the aims of a social one-act play, yet a critical assessment must also recognise its artistic cost.

14. Recognition, Moral Reversal, and the Problem of Forgiveness

The ninth scene is one of moral recognition. Kulānand, who in the exercise of his dominance had refused to acknowledge his son's wrongdoing, recognises the person who has saved his son's life, and the moral meaning of the earlier offence is transformed. Aristotle's discussion of recognition and reversal in the *Poetics* supplies a useful analogy for understanding dramatic change. In *Lāj*, however, the change is not equivalent to an event in classical tragedy but constitutes a moral reversal within the confines of social drama. The purpose of the comparison is not to force the play into an Aristotelian model, but to see its culminating scene more clearly.

The strength of this reversal lies in a memory established earlier in the plot. Kulānand does not receive assistance from an unknown physician; his son is saved through the care of the very girl whose education his family had obstructed. This sharply articulated moral arrangement enables the audience to reach its own conclusion. The final admission of wrongdoing gives that conclusion verbal form.

Savitā's medical care: recognition and remorse without an assured institutional remedy

But acknowledgement of wrongdoing is not the same as justice. Bhogendra asks forgiveness, Kulānand repents, and Savitā provides medical care. How far has the unequal power that caused the violence been transformed? How much has the school improved? Has the victim received justice acceptable to her? These questions remain unanswered. If a moral resolution is treated as synonymous with a legal or institutional resolution, the play's limitation disappears from view.

The plot chooses compassion and public service rather than revenge, and this is its humanistic achievement. It would also be excessive to construe it simply as an injunction that a woman must forgive her offender, since Savitā's treatment of him is connected with professional duty. Nevertheless, the expectation of moral greatness from a woman after injustice raises a critical question: is Savitā's forgiveness a decision she has chosen or an ideal imposed by the narrative? The text offers no definitive answer; its ending leaves room for that debate.

15. A Women's-Studies Perspective: Equality, Choice, and the "Ideal Daughter"

Shyām Babu declares that there should be no distinction between sons and daughters. This principle calls the division of labour within the household into question, since the father believes that domestic chores leave his daughter no time to spare. The mother's consent, the teacher's support, and Savitā's insistence together produce a new family agreement in favour of girls' education. The play's progressive character resides in this combined change.

Yet the criteria for being an ideal daughter continually change throughout Savitā's story: first "good upbringing," then quick intelligence, subsequently

professional achievement in medicine, and finally generosity towards her offender. These are positive qualities, but equality ought not to be a reward reserved for exceptional performance. UNESCO's study of gender and education makes clear that poverty, social norms, institutional conduct, and violence combine to restrict girls' opportunities. Viewed against this broader account, Savitā in *Lāj* is an exceptionally successful girl, not a representative of the average life of all girls.

Feminist research on Maithili drama has also investigated women characters' subordination and alternative voices of resistance. From this perspective, Savitā in *Lāj* is neither wholly silent nor fully autonomous: her voice propels the plot, but the decisive resources become available through her father, teacher, and maternal uncle. Recognising this mixed condition is essential to an understanding of the play's treatment of women.

16. The Credibility of the Social Resolution and the Play's Dramatic Limitations

The play's first distinctive achievement is the changing social location of the meaning of its title. Its second is its creative presentation of the dual reality of rural schooling: negligent teachers alongside a conscientious teacher, and violence alongside the right to education. Its third is the arrangement of Kulānand's courtyard on stage, where the chair, the requirement to remain standing, and the language of command give material form to power relations. Its fourth is the social trajectory between Savitā's entry through the window and her return as a physician.

The limitations are equally evident. Bhogendra's course from offending adolescent to alcoholic young man is excessively linear; Kulānand's transformation from a cruel protector of privilege into a repentant citizen is rapid; and the absence of the intervening years of Savitā's advancement diminishes the multiplicity of lived experience. At times dialogue explains an intention instead of advancing the action. Consequently, the narrative is morally effective but limited in psychological complexity.

As a public performance intended to encourage education, this concise moral design may prove effective, especially if the acting attends to the characters' bodily expression, pauses in dialogue, social distance, and the final silence. Practical assessment of the staging, however, must take account of the need for careful scene transitions arising from nine scenes, numerous locations, groups of pupils, and a long passage of time. The playwright's initial aspiration towards performance suggests the possibilities of this form, but actual success in production cannot be established from that aspiration alone.

17. Conclusion: Who Should Feel Shame?

Lāj begins from a moral commitment to women's education and proceeds towards a more complex debate about social power and self-awareness. The

society that fears "disgrace" when a daughter goes beyond the household eventually arrives at the recognition that the real sources of shame in public life are injustice, arrogance, and the denial of opportunity. The play's final message calls for support for education, but its artistic centre lies in this relocation of the word *lāj*.

A critical reading of the text also demonstrates that individual kindness cannot wholly substitute for social justice. Recognising Savitā's ability and courage, ensuring a safe school, resisting the illegitimate dominance of the wealthy, and providing equal resources to the children of poor families are interrelated social questions. The play tells of one successful daughter and an offending family that changes its ways; in the light of that story, it becomes the reader's responsibility to imagine a society in which no girl must possess extraordinary talent, have a benevolent maternal uncle, or ultimately save the life of her offender in order to receive an education.

Thus the value of *Lāj* lies not only in its idealised happy ending but in the visual signs of inequality within it, a woman's first assertion of her voice, the failure of institutional protection, and the shame that arises in response to injustice. In the study of Maithili social one-act drama, the work may be read as a useful example of vernacular dialogue, consciousness of educational rights, and moral reversal—an example whose criticism takes its achievements and limitations with equal seriousness.

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Pañcaitī: Social Justice, Caste Regulation, and Women's Resistance

Abstract

Rajdev Mandal's short screenplay *Pañcaitī* (2013) centres on an inter-caste love marriage to present the conflict among collective discipline in rural society, women's autonomy, and legal justice. Extending across nine scenes, the work depends less upon the number of incidents than upon the progressive enlargement of resistance. Through close reading, an examination of scene construction, the interrelationship of caste and patriarchy, and the legal context of marital choice, this essay evaluates the work's ideological and artistic achievements. The study shows that the *pañcaitī* of the title emerges not as an ideal of popular judgment but as the punitive performance of social domination; in opposition to it, Gītā becomes the centre of moral reasoning, public dissent, and concerted action. At the same time, Lalitā's silence, gaps between incidents, the abruptness of the legal resolution, and the father's extraordinarily rapid change of heart are identified as creative limitations of the screenplay. In conclusion, *Pañcaitī* is an important attempt to translate a social problem into visual confrontation: its strength resides in the representation of public resistance, and its limitation in the insufficient space accorded to the independent experience of its various characters.

Keywords: short screenplay; Rajdev Mandal; Pañcaitī; inter-caste marriage; caste; women's autonomy; social justice; scene construction

1. Introduction: Title and Creative Context

The name *Pañcaitī* immediately suggests collective village deliberation, the settlement of disputes, and a locally constituted practice of justice. Rajdev Mandal imparts a critical significance to this familiar term. Here the community assembles, the *pañcs* take their seats, and a verdict is pronounced; yet the decision rests not upon facts, rights, or the consent of the parties, but upon caste prestige and the fear of collective humiliation. This contradiction between title and subject constitutes the work's central implication. Rather than treating justice as an unquestionable institutional authority, *Pañcaitī* interrogates the legitimacy of the claim to dispense it.

At the centre of the screenplay are Lalitā and Kishan's mutual love and their decision to marry. That decision provokes a violent reaction from relatives, the caste community, and the village council. But the narrative concerns not only the rescue of two lovers; it also stages a second struggle: how a woman's moral judgment becomes a public voice within society itself. Lalitā's friend Gītā transforms the incident from a private calamity into a question of public injustice. Thus love is the work's declared centre, while Gītā's resistance is its centre of action.

Published in its first edition in 2013, this short screenplay can be read as a literary response to the social tensions of its time; nevertheless, its subject is not confined to that particular year. The question here is not simply who opposes love, but which institution, relationship, or language assumes the right to decide another person's life. Once this question is foregrounded, the book ceases to be a unilinear tract of social instruction and becomes a small but incisive dramatic arena of power, consent, and resistance.

2. Method and Critical Framework

The primary basis of this study is the screenplay's own arrangement of characters, dialogue, stage directions, and final sequence of events. The analysis first considers how the work orders its incidents; next, which characters are allowed to speak, act, or remain silent; and finally, how convincingly the social justice advocated by the narrative is realised through its mode of representation. For this reason, agreement with the work's ideological commitments is not conflated with artistic success.

Ambedkar's thinking on the annihilation of caste provides a useful theoretical background for considering caste and marriage. He regards inter-caste marriage as an important means of reducing caste separation. Uma Chakravarti's research discloses the profound connection between the reproduction of caste and the regulation of women's sexuality and marital choice. Read together, these perspectives make clear that opposition to Lalitā's marriage is not merely a general defence of 'tradition': it is also a defence of the group's boundaries and of male-centred authority over decisions.

Seymour Chatman's distinction between 'story' and 'discourse' is useful for separating plot events from their narration and presentation. An event's occurrence and its visible enactment before an audience are different matters. Particular attention is therefore given to those intervals where a decisive social or legal development is assumed to have occurred in the story but its unfolding is not shown through dramatic action.

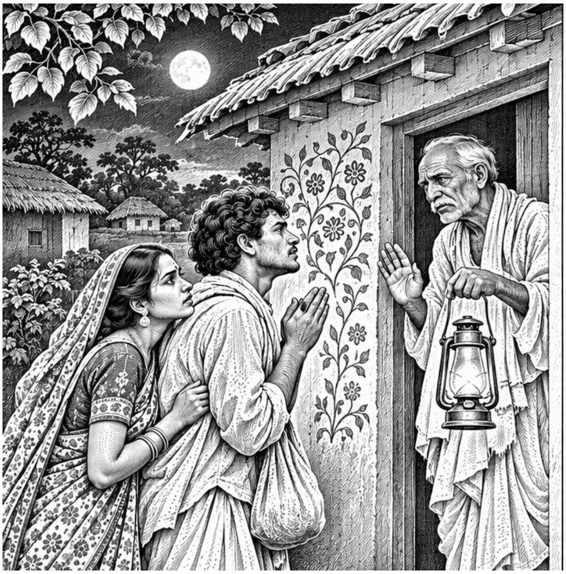
3. Nine Scenes: From Information to Public Confrontation

The first scene opens in Dhanesar's courtyard. The information that Gītā has gone to sit an examination establishes the domestic context of education; immediately afterwards Dhanesar raises the story that Ramuā's daughter Lalitā has left with a young man and attributes blame to increasing education. Gītā's mother objects that such incidents occurred in earlier times too. This brief domestic exchange presents not merely two generational viewpoints but also the manufacture of 'news': the person whose life decision is at issue has no voice, while those concerned for prestige begin defining the event.

The second scene depicts villagers gathering at Ramuā's doorway. What begins in the family's distress becomes a question of collective caste honour. One villager adopts a language of humiliation; another intimates punishment; and a third fears that a conflict between caste factions may benefit some other group. Thus

the crowd is not merely a spontaneous product of injured morality; it is also a political formation calculating mutual balances of power. This collective conversation subtly suggests why the caste community responds so fiercely to private love.

The third scene unfolds at Sahadev's house in the darkness of night. Kishan and Lalitā enter furtively; Sahadev emerges with a lantern and is disturbed by the arrival of the young couple. Night, lantern, and fear lend the scene symbolic gravity. Kishan states plainly that both are adults and have the right to marry. Sahadev replies: 'The law stands in its own place, and backward society remains obstinate in its own.' The screenplay's most effective ideological tension is compressed into this statement. Legal rights are acknowledged, but the reality of social reprisal obstructs their practical exercise.



Kishan and Lalitā seek refuge: legal rights confronted by fear of reprisal

The fourth scene opens upon Gītā's teaching environment. She is teaching children when Lalitā's letter arrives. Her immediate departure to obtain help gives the events a decisive turn. The fifth scene follows Gītā cycling along a road. She is said to be absorbed in memories of her own love, yet no developed episode connected with that memory follows. The suggestion thus opens an emotional possibility, but its dramatic return remains limited.

The sixth scene occurs in the house of a retired schoolmaster. Reading in his private library, he speaks of his lifelong efforts to break caste restrictions and assures Gītā of his assistance. The seventh returns to Gītā's home, where Dhanesar confronts his daughter with fragments of Lalitā's torn letter. Gītā refuses to regard the lovers as guilty. Dhanesar locks her inside the house; in the eighth scene, a boy passing along the road opens the door from outside. Across

this sequence, education, communication, surveillance, confinement, and cooperation become brief but interconnected actions.

The ninth and final scene is set at the village council ground. The *pañcs* seated on a raised platform beneath a tree, the villagers gathered below, young men standing with sticks, and the encircled lovers together construct not a courtroom but a stage for social repression. The *pañcs* propose public humiliation and corporal punishment. Gītā steps forward from the crowd to challenge the decision. Immediately afterwards the schoolmaster and a police officer arrive; the legal papers of the marriage are mentioned; the couple are released, and Dhanesar finally blesses Gītā. This ending discloses the work's aspiration towards justice, although the ease of the resolution raises questions of dramatic construction.

4. The Inversion of 'Pañcaitī': Community versus Justice

The conceptual standing of a village council is ordinarily associated with mediation and popular consensus. In Mandal's scenic design, however, the presence of the *pañcs* gives rise to no inquiry into the accusation and no procedure for hearing the parties. A predetermined conclusion—that the community's prestige has been injured—dominates every decision. The elevated position of the *pañcs* on the platform and the encircled young man and woman below visually disclose a hierarchy of power. The height of the platform signifies not judicial eminence but the visual language of domination.

Expressions in the villagers' speech such as 'the nose of caste' and 'honour and reputation' turn individual lives into the symbolic property of the group. The lovers' consent or happiness becomes secondary in this idiom; the principal question is how the community's 'nose' is to be saved. The proposed acts of violence—shaving hair, smearing the face with soot and lime, seating the victims on a donkey, and whipping them—seek to transform social control into a spectacle of humiliation. These punishments are proposed not upon proof of an offence but as demonstrations of collective authority.

In this form the title functions as critical irony. The assembly called a *pañcaitī* allows no independent deliberation; collective excitement assumes the status of truth. The scene does not demand condemnation of every form of local democracy. Its particular accusation is directed at the unlawful power to punish that, in the name of communal prestige, negates the independent decisions of adults. Preserving this distinction is critically necessary.

5. The Joint Discipline of Caste and Patriarchy

To describe the opposition to Lalitā's marriage simply as casteism would leave the work's gender dimension inadequately understood. The information that a girl has left her home immediately produces a chain of Ramuā's social shame, the villagers' caste anger, and violent reactions among male relatives. When society makes a girl's body and marital choice the bearer of family prestige, her

consent becomes inherently political. Chakravarti's argument offers a way of discerning this structural relationship.

Dhanesar's confinement of Gītā in the house is another form of the same structure. Gītā leaves home to change Lalitā's fate; her father prohibits her departure. Discipline falls here not only on Lalitā, who loves, but also on Gītā, who speaks in love's defence. Control over women consequently extends beyond consent to marriage into the rights to speech, movement, and the public expression of communal dissent.

Yet all the male characters are not represented alike. Sahadev voices less a principled rejection of his son's love than fear of social punishment. The schoolmaster, by contrast, remains willing to help even after the failure of his lifelong efforts at institutional reform. This difference prevents the play from collapsing into the simplistic formula of 'all men versus all women'. The fundamental object of opposition is not maleness as such, but the assertion of collective ownership over individual freedom.

6. Gītā: From Supporting Character to Moral Protagonist

Gītā is absent at the beginning of the narrative, when her father comments on her education. As the plot advances, she is shown teaching children, reading a letter, riding a bicycle, asking the schoolmaster for help, escaping a locked house, and reasoning before the village council. Her character takes shape through the totality of this sequence of actions. She does not merely voice support for the marriage: she takes risks and organises practical assistance. In this sense Gītā is the screenplay's protagonist of action.

Gītā on the road: education, mobility, and the work of resistance

Gītā's education is more than a sign of personal achievement. At the beginning Dhanesar associates education with moral deterioration; at the end his educated daughter becomes a source of public judgment. This internal contradiction between the first and final scenes forms part of the work's organised design of meaning. Of education's two possibilities—disciplined social advancement and critical consciousness—Gītā embodies the second. Her reasoning connects the language of legal rights to the value of human life.

It would nevertheless be inappropriate to regard Gītā as an omnipotent saviour. She receives support from the schoolmaster's social standing, the boy's small act of assistance, and finally state intervention. Attention to this collaboration reveals the collective potential of resistance. The irony is that while one part of the community assembles for violence, another, comparatively small group forges relations of assistance and protection. 'Society' is not one immutable authority, but a field of conflict within itself.

A complicated aspect of Gītā's moral victory emerges at the end. Dhanesar gives his blessing, yet this acceptance follows not directly from hearing Gītā's argument but after the schoolmaster praises her. How far the father is moved by his daughter's words, and how far by the authority of a respected male teacher, is left unclear. Within this subtle incompletion, the question of women's autonomy comes alive once more.

7. Lalitā's Silence: The Centre of the Plot and the Limits of Representation

The most consequential artistic problem of *Pañcaitī* is its representation of Lalitā. The action begins with her love and decision to marry; the council

assembles over the threat of her humiliation; and Gītā struggles to save her. Yet in the available sequence of scenes Lalitā is scarcely seen giving an extended account of her own wishes. She enters, accompanies Kishan, and is surrounded by the crowd, but has almost no opportunity to speak. Her absence from the list of female characters makes this imbalance still more conspicuous.

This is not merely a technical oversight but a question of narrative perspective. When marital autonomy is the principal subject, giving voice to the young woman who makes the decision—to her experience, hesitation, risks, and desires—assumes particular importance. Gītā's powerful speech clarifies the play's progressive significance, but Lalitā's silence obstructs the complete artistic fulfilment of that progressive purpose. Speaking on behalf of women's rights and allowing a woman to speak for herself are two distinct achievements.

Kishan's dialogue receives relatively greater development. He discusses his majority and the legal right to marry: the male lover here interprets his own decision, while the female lover remains primarily a visible presence. This imbalance is rightly identified as a specific limitation of the work. Nevertheless, through Gītā the author constructs another model of women's independent moral leadership. The text should therefore be understood not as hostility towards women, but as an unequal distribution of female representation.

8. Dialogue, Vernacular Speech, and Scenic Craft

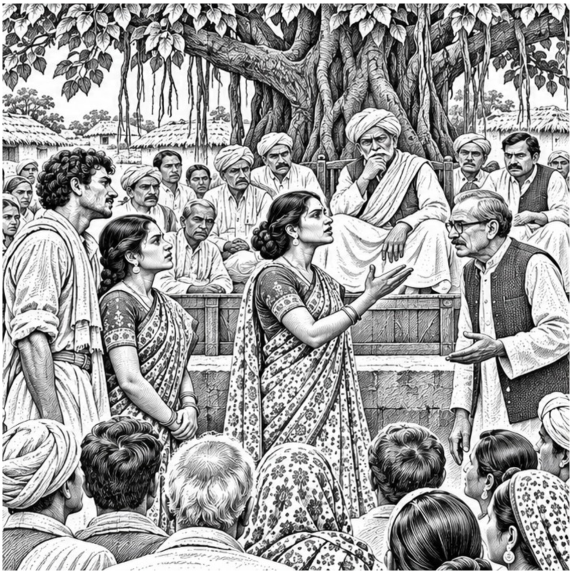
The screenplay's language is driven by dialogue. The villagers' excited, fragmentary and direct colloquial speech, Sahadev's fearful warning, Kishan's consciousness of rights, Gītā's reasoned opposition, and the schoolmaster's reformist voice mark differing social positions. Particularly in the early scenes, the naturalness of the language accelerates the unfolding of events. The cadence of local speech makes anger, agitation, and social pressure dramatically palpable.

The succession of courtyard, doorstep, house at night, classroom, road, library, locked house, and council ground beneath a tree creates the sensation of movement from private to public space. A matter initiated in a courtyard reaches a public platform at the end. In parallel, Gītā's journeys give visible form to an individual woman's mobility. The bicycle is a particularly significant object: not merely a vehicle but a sign of readiness and the capacity to move beyond the limits of surveillance.

Fragments of a letter and the marriage document reveal contrasting uses of written evidence. The first letter is a message of assistance and trust; its torn fragments reach the father's hands and become a means of monitoring Gītā. At the end, the marriage papers are presented to secure the couple's safety. Paper is thus not a mere object but a medium of struggle over power: in one instance exposing the secret of a private relationship, in another supporting a claim of legally recognised consent. This parallel symbolism is an artistic achievement of considerable promise in the screenplay.

The later dialogue nevertheless presents difficulties. Gītā's speech at the council, the schoolmaster's remarks, and the police officer's warning clarify important issues; in several places, however, the characters become spokespeople for predetermined ideas rather than making the situation more complex. Brecht's theory of socially responsible theatre can help explain the purpose of this tendency, but the acceptance of a social purpose does not automatically compensate for a deficiency of artistic complexity.

9. Law, Public Honour, and Constitutional Morality



At the village council: a punitive assembly challenged in public

Kishan's declaration of adulthood and Gītā's legal arguments for marital choice articulate the screenplay's fundamental ethical claim. Yet the actual legal context must be carefully distinguished from what the play asserts. In India, the Special Marriage Act, 1954, provides a legal framework for marriage, although marriages under it require compliance with definite conditions and procedures. The final scene states that marriage papers had reached the police station; on that basis, the plot treats the marriage as having taken place. The text itself does not depict the full marriage procedure, so no specific inference is warranted about the nature of the papers or the legal route adopted.

Before the play's publication, in *Lata Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh*, the Supreme Court had affirmed adults' freedom to marry according to their choice and their right to protection against caste-based threats. In this respect, Kishan's and Gītā's arguments about rights accord with judicial thinking available at the time. More importantly, the Court's reasoning rejects the treatment of marital choice as a merely familial dispute: threats and violence become matters of public law.

The subsequent judgment in *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India* elaborated the illegality of obstructing adults' marital choices in the name of social honour. That 2018 decision postdates the work: it should not be represented as a direct influence upon the author in 2013, but as a judicial perspective clarifying a present-day critical reading. Gītā's public statement and the police officer's intervention dramatise this broader constitutional question: a community may fashion its own understanding of honour, but it cannot thereby establish a punitive right over the bodies and decisions of others.

It is nevertheless necessary to scrutinise the assurance that the state's mere presence will transform society. The lowering of the councillors' heads at a single police warning and Dhanesar's immediate change produce the moral outcome desired by the work. The longer forms of actual social tension—retaliation, ostracism, safety, and livelihood—remain beyond the play's limits. Their absence does not make its legal position false, but it does render its dramatic resolution comparatively simple.

10. The Strengths and Contradictions of Dramatic Construction

The order of the nine scenes is purposeful: rumour and domestic comment, the formation of the crowd, the lovers' fear, Gītā's recognition of the problem, the search for support, paternal repression, release from domestic confinement, and public intervention. The diffusion of tension across this sequence is successfully constructed. Aristotle's discussion of plot emphasises the necessary or probable relationship between events; measured by this criterion, the causal sequence of the early scenes is particularly concentrated.

The most incisive scene takes place at Sahadev's home. No easy solution mediates between Kishan's sense of rights and his father Sahadev's apprehensions. Sahadev does not oppose the law: he points to the social insecurity attending the exercise of legal rights. His speech is thus marked by a complexity of experience. Another effective moment is Gītā's confinement, where patriarchy becomes not merely an utterance but the physical obstacle of a closed door. The eighth scene breaks this barrier through a small boy's help: an appealing scenic conception of the social extension of resistance.

The principal weaknesses concern events conveyed as information instead of being dramatised. How the marriage formalities were completed with the schoolmaster's assistance, how the lovers were seized and brought before the council, and what happened in Gītā's earlier remembered romance—none receives scenic development. In particular, the fifth scene, by referring to action 'as directed', leaves its opened possibility undeveloped. As a result, a distance persists between dramatic completeness and evidence established through the scenes themselves.

The final scene offers a just outcome, but all the work's major institutional forces converge at its climax: the council, an educated woman, the schoolmaster, and the police. Such compression is understandable in relation to the short

screenplay's scale; nevertheless, without prior preparation the police arrival feels abrupt. Dhanesar's concluding blessing is important as a narrative sign, but the process of his inner transformation has not been sufficiently earned in dramatic action.

Acknowledging these limitations does not diminish the work's achievements; rather, it brings them into sharper view. *Pañcaitī* correctly locates the social centre of the incident: caste supremacy is embodied not merely in ideas but in crowds, threats, rituals of humiliation, and restrictions on private movement. The play brings these embodied forms onto the stage in few words. Its artistic challenge is to ensure that the plurality of lives—above all Lalitā's experience—is not eclipsed by the forcefulness of its argument.

11. Conclusion: The Dramatic Language of Resistance and Its Incompleteness

The central achievement of Rajdev Mandal's *Pañcaitī* is its transformation of an individual love marriage into a question of social justice and civic rights. The title's implicit irony, the raised platform as a sign of power, the violent vocabulary of caste honour, Dhanesar's confinement of his daughter, Gītā's bicycle journey, and her public challenge to collective punishment together create a concentrated dramatic landscape. Gītā is an active figure of resistance on the part of an educated woman; the assistance of the schoolmaster and the boy suggests that avenues of opposition to injustice can arise within society itself.

In defending the right to love, the work affirms not simply a private emotion but the ethical standing of individual autonomy. Its wider significance becomes clear in the context of Ambedkar's critique of caste, studies of the social regulation of women, and Indian judicial thought. Yet to commend a work's social aim is not to endorse every decision of artistic craft. Lalitā's silence, the absence of scenes depicting decisive events, the suddenness of the final resolution, and the father's rapid conversion remain serious questions for criticism.

Ultimately, *Pañcaitī* may be assessed as a short screenplay courageous enough to expose the injustice concealed within a rural institution's claim to administer justice. It takes a clear position in favour of legal and moral resistance to caste violence, but leaves immense possibilities of representation unrealised. Its real literary significance lies in this duality: even as it announces the resolution of a problem, it confronts the reader with an unanswered question—how can the afflicted woman's own voice be brought to the centre of public decision-making?

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The Colours of Triveṇī: Narratives of Home, Class, and Fear

An Extended Literary Review of Rajdev Mandal's 'Rūsal Bauā', 'Dokh Kekar', and 'Ḍarak Nadī'

Abstract

The three stories in Rajdev Mandal's *Triveṇīk Raṅg*—'Rūsal Bauā', 'Dokh Kekar', and 'Ḍarak Nadī'—turn the familiar domestic world into an intense theatre of social contradictions. In the first, the wish to visit a fair in new clothes reveals economic division through a child's perspective; in the second, tensions between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, miscarriage, and the pain of motherhood become ethical questions through a story-within-a-story; in the third, a dream, old age, and a snake's discarded skin expose the family's fearful structure. This study moves beyond a recital of incidents to develop an argument about narrative position, dialogue, endings, women's experience, class distance, and symbolism. Alongside the strengths of all three stories, it identifies the ideological limits of their resolutions: children's intelligence cannot in itself abolish economic inequality, the glorification of motherhood may suppress women's dissent, and recognising fear does not remove its social causes. Their critical significance resides in these tensions.

Keywords: Rajdev Mandal; Triveṇīk Raṅg; Maithili short-short fiction; class inequality; domestic power; motherhood; dreams; narratology.

1. Uncomfortable Questions in the Familiar World of Fiction

A short story achieves its effect not simply through size but through disciplined selection. A moment, confrontation, or exchange may accumulate sufficient pressure to disclose a human condition without the breadth of an extended narrative. Rajdev Mandal's *Triveṇīk Raṅg* offers an interesting example of this possibility. Its title suggests the celebration of colour, yet within the three stories under consideration, celebration is accompanied by deprivation, intimacy by humiliation, and a sense of security by fear. Apparently ordinary domestic incidents gradually turn into searching critiques of social relationships.

The collection's first edition was published by Shruti Prakashan, Delhi, in 2014. It has been described as a collection of *vihanī* and short stories. The textual basis of the present discussion is 'Rūsal Bauā', 'Dokh Kekar', and 'Ḍarak Nadī'. Its conclusions consequently rest on close examination of these three works; no claims are advanced about the plots or aesthetic qualities of other pieces in the collection without textual evidence. This restriction is not a weakness of criticism but the discipline required between evidence and conclusion.

Here 'Triveṇī' may be read as a conjunction of three different conditions of life. One current concerns economic inequality and childhood desire; a second the moral obligations of family and traditional control over women's bodies; a third

collective self-interest and insecurity about the future. This is a structure of meaning proposed by the reader, not proof of an authorially declared plan. The distinction matters because a work's meanings develop through the reader's critical activity, but must remain answerable to indications actually found in the text.

2. The Writer's Context and the Method of Criticism

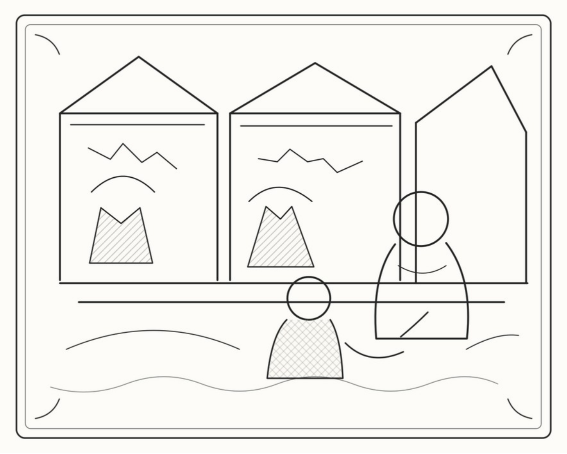
In an interview published in 2012, Rajdev Mandal reflects on his earliest writing in Maithili, the scarcity of means of publication, and his reasons for literary activity in Hindi. His own account combines attachment to the mother tongue with the practical difficulties of publication. This autobiographical statement helps illuminate the writer's literary trajectory, but it would be a critical error to treat every utterance by a fictional character as the author's personal opinion. Narrator, character, and historical author occupy three distinct levels.

This study attends particularly to the sequence of the stories, narrative position, characters' perspectives, and the effects of their endings. Gérard Genette's discussions of time, distance, and narrative levels, together with Susan S. Lanser's analysis of point of view, provide instruments of reading; they are applied in relation to examples rather than imposed mechanically as theory. Bakhtin's thinking on plurality of voices is also relevant for understanding utterances emerging from different social positions within dialogue. The governing question throughout is where the stories generate sympathy and where they expose contradictions in their own ethical claims.

3. 'Rūsal Bauā': The Darkness of Deprivation amid the Fair's Brightness

3.1 Clothing, the Fair, and Social Distance

'Rūsal Bauā' begins with the Durga Puja fair. Households prepare sweets, dried fruits, and new clothes; children are excited; the occasion promises a social gathering. These details create a collective scene of celebration. Yet the story's central question is this: where does the equality of celebration remain when a child wishes to participate in the festival of his imagination but his family cannot meet even an ordinary request for clothing? Bechū is distressed by his companion Amit's new shirt and trousers. The fair becomes less a religious background than a public stage of consumption and social comparison.



The fair and the new clothes: childhood desire amid unequal means

Phekan's first concern—where has his son gone, and is he hungry?—expresses his attention to the child's immediate needs. His wife explains the reason for the boy's sulking and the teasing he has endured from Amit. These two maternal and paternal expressions of affection do not contradict one another; they are different anxious responses within a single family under pressure from deprivation. Phekan has no money in hand. His despair arises not from indifference but from scarce resources and the helplessness of being unable to fulfil his responsibilities.

The mention of Amit's father's government employment, greater landholdings, and economic standing connects the immediate question of clothes with institutional inequality. The social designation 'important people' carries prestige along with property. Bechū does not accept it as natural. His question, in essence, is why he should regard himself as inferior solely because of family wealth when he finds himself no less capable in physique, education, or games. Here the story opens the contradiction between inherited status and acquired ability.

3.2 The Dignity of Labour and the Structure of Humiliation

Phekan's speech gathers the alternating arrival of drought and flooding, labour by day and night, poor yields, bodily illness, and the difficulty of migrating in search of income. This account establishes the poor householder's industry in opposition to any charge of idleness. His predicament is not personal sloth, but the unequal relationship between labour and reward. Fields, weather, health, and domestic expenses are interwoven problems. The child is being educated, yet the costs of schooling further reduce the family's remaining resources.

When his wife tells Phekan that he is 'good for nothing', language becomes a weapon of economic humiliation. The expression turns a man's employment crisis into a supposed failure of his entire humanity. The narrator communicates the pain arising within him: humiliation is not merely a sentence heard by the

ear, but an experience of labour being devalued. Yet it would be wrong to declare his wife simply cruel. Her words also contain the memory of her own pleasures and wishes having been burned away, and her fear for the child's future. Bitter language within a household often becomes the medium of deprivation whose actual causes extend far beyond the household.

The story's most affecting turn arises from Bechū's attentive listening. The child is not outside the tangled quarrel; he stands in partial concealment and hears everything. His compassionate response, asking his father not to cry, transforms the story's organisation of sympathy. The son for whom the father could not procure clothes becomes the one to console him. The emotional centre shifts from acquiring clothes to mutual human recognition.

3.3 The Child's Answer: Hope or the Repetition of Competition?

Bechū resolves to answer the insult by obtaining higher marks in the examination than Amit. His resistance can be read as an assertion of self-respect. The embrace between father and son and the mother's smile turn a moment of defeat into one of hope. The final feeling—that, for a moment, differences between great and small, high and low, appear to have a single colour—also responds to the collection's title. Yet the qualification 'for a moment' is crucial: the experience of temporary equality does not itself abolish the economic structure.

A critical counter-question arises here. Bechū responds to his companion's display of new clothes and mockery in the language of making that companion a 'fool' through examination results. Self-respect is restored, but the logic of competition survives in its old form. Educational attainment is useful social capital, but education by itself cannot close disparities in land, wages, and losses caused by weather. Within its brief form the story does not supply an economic solution. Its achievement is to establish shared feeling between father and son in place of cruel social comparison. This is a real achievement, but the structural question remains open.

4. 'Dokh Kekar': From Blame to Memory

4.1 The Moral Inequality of Domestic Disagreement

'Dokh Kekar' begins with the silence of night and a husband and wife still awake. Dinesh urges his wife to eat; she complains of abuse from her mother-in-law and questions her husband's inaction. Two kinds of suffering are equally apparent in the opening exchange: a son's obligation towards his elderly mother, and the self-respect of a daughter-in-law seeking dignity in her new family. To reduce these to a simple verdict of one being right and the other wrong would diminish the story's complexity. The title, 'Whose Fault?', asks the reader to judge causes and responsibilities.

Dinesh does not immediately contradict her. Instead he recounts an older story about a woman. This embedded account begins with neglect by her husband and

father-in-law, bitterness arising from an inadequate dowry, repeated pregnancy losses, a regime that lays blame upon her character and body, and the search for treatment. The woman initially cherished by husband and father-in-law becomes unwelcome to the same family in misfortune. The story allows this change to be read not merely as a fluctuation in personal temperament but as the injustice of making a woman's social worth depend upon the outcome of motherhood.

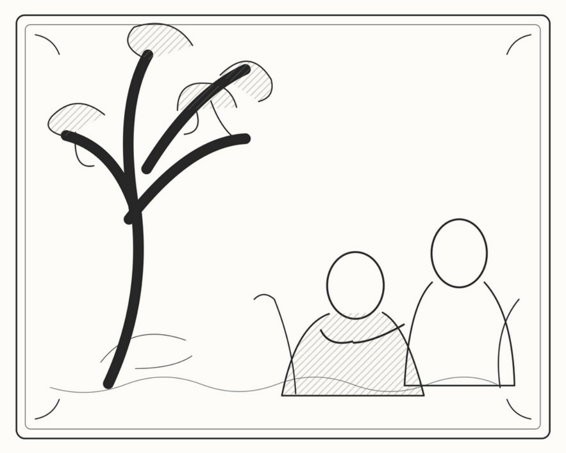
Importantly, the language of 'fault' returns repeatedly in the conversation involving husband and son. The question of blame is as acute in the present dispute between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law as the readiness to blame a woman had been severe in Dinesh's account of an earlier life. A kind of moral echo forms within the narrative: below the present conflict between women lies an injustice inflicted on the older generation by relations of male power.

4.2 Miscarriage, Dowry, and Exile: A Critical Reading

In Dinesh's account, miscarriage recurs around the fifth month of pregnancy. At such a time of grief a woman ought to have access to treatment, companionship, and rest, but she is regarded as the sole cause of her body's supposed failure. The story's formulation 'not the pain of food, but the pain of words' is an emotional aphorism: the injury inflicted by humiliating speech differs from hunger, but is no less intense. A woman's mind and body do not remain separate concerns here; persistent tension is portrayed as aggravating her physical suffering.

On returning to her natal home, the woman experiences a sense of shade and shelter. This image subtly comments on women's social geography: her marital home, though a place of duty, brought insecurity, whereas her parents' home offers refuge in distress. Her parents pursue remedies. On a mendicant's advice they impose severe rules: the pregnant daughter must live apart from the household in a mango grove, cook for herself, and cease conversation. She undergoes a kind of exile—sleeping on *kuśa* grass, enduring the weather, fearing animals, and facing long nights of solitude.

The literary power of this passage lies in its precise material detail. Wounds on the body from rope, sleep on the ground, and a mother coming in the middle of the night to embrace her daughter and sleep beside her link the mythic conception of sacrifice to actual bodily pain. The mother's clandestine visits form the account's gentlest counterforce: the rule supposedly devised for the daughter's welfare deprives her of human companionship, and the mother breaks that inhumanity, if only partially. The writer offers such detailed depiction that the reader's attention turns to the suffering imposed upon motherhood before its celebration.



The mango grove: a mother's nocturnal care amid the ordeal of exile

After the exile a son is born, and affection returns to the family. The sequence of events makes this belief powerful in the characters' lives; but a literary text cannot establish asceticism or isolation as medical treatment for miscarriage. The genuine critical question is why the woman's human dignity is restored only after the birth of a son. The narrative presents the happiness of the result while leaving before the reader the problem of acceptance conditional upon that result. A tension is apparent between the writer's compassion and the social belief still operating within the story.

4.3 Story within Story and the Revelation of Identity

Listening to Dinesh's life story, his wife does not at first know that the woman described is her own mother-in-law, or that the son in the story is Dinesh himself. When the relationship is revealed at the end, the character of the narrative changes. The anonymous presentation of past events temporarily suspends the present argument; the revelation of identity works through the listening character's moral imagination. In Genette's terms of narrative levels, a second level of narration enters the primary dialogue and is ultimately connected to the characters' relationships in the present.

After the final silence, an indication of renewed closeness between Dinesh and his wife appears. The harshness of debate gives way to emotional communication; the narrator does not deliver a judicial verdict upon the quarrel. Yet the resolution requires an essential caution: the mother-in-law's suffering in the past does not automatically invalidate the daughter-in-law's complaint today. To silence a daughter-in-law's present pain on the authority of a mother's endured suffering would be another injustice. Read as an expansion of compassion, the story teaches attention to everyone's suffering; converted merely into advice that the daughter-in-law submit, it would place two generations of

women once again in opposition. Its critical significance resides in this double-edged possibility.

5. 'Ḍarak Nadī': Family in the Dream, Insecurity on Waking

5.1 The Dream Frame and the Neglect of the Elderly

'Ḍarak Nadī' begins with Saritā's sleeplessness. Once sleep comes, she sees a family of mice in a dream. The possibility of a snake at the mouth of their burrow spreads panic through the family. Children, grandchildren, uncles, nephews, and elders all face the same danger, but respond differently. The old mouse's experienced authority initially commands respect; as the crisis intensifies, however, pressure grows to send him out 'first' to investigate. Family consultation rapidly turns into a recommendation for sacrifice.

The old mouse says there is no place in the world where fear will not pursue one and that survival demands struggle. His is a claim grounded in age and experience. Yet a grandson reminds him of tales of his former courage and incites him to undergo the test. Two forms of intergenerational relationship appear together: the desire to profit from experience and the impulse to use the experienced body as a pawn exposed to risk. The elder's counsel is respected so long as it serves the family without cost; when it is time to defend himself, he is branded a burden.

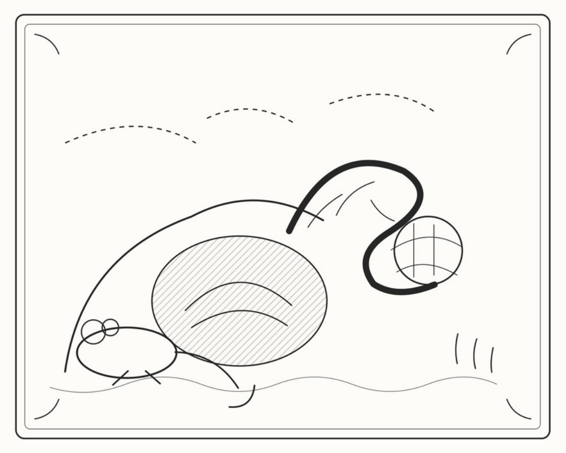
Different family members advance different arguments. Some say the elder has lived his time, others deem him a burden, others show emotion, but the ultimate decision is to push him towards danger. This is not a uniform demonstration of open cruelty; its sharpest feature is that utilitarian reasoning presents itself in the ethical language of protecting the family. The problem of social abandonment emerges through the characters' dialogue without explicit sermonising. The old mouse's anguish—'I have become a burden to you'—brings the economic and emotional insecurity of old age to the centre.

5.2 The Snake's Cast Skin: Visible Fear and Actual Danger

Under pressure, the old mouse approaches the burrow trembling. His bodily fear—an unsteady gait, loss of control, and hiding in the brush—prevents the story from remaining a mere moral fable: fear takes a practical, embodied form. When he discovers that the apparent snake near the burrow is its shed skin, a moment of humour and relief follows. But a question immediately interrupts that relief: where has the real snake gone? Correct identification of the object does not end insecurity; rather, it intensifies the possibility of an unseen danger.

The story's craft becomes significant at precisely this point. Fear began with an object in view; when the object proves false, fear transfers to the imagination of something absent. Initially there is the appearance of a snake, finally its possible presence. This transition suggests that danger originates not only in things seen, but also in mistrust lodged within relationships. Instead of reassuring the old

mouse that he is safe, the family members jostle him and rush towards the burrow; the disorder produced by physical terror turns into social violence.



The snake's shed skin: mistaken danger and the uncertainty beyond it

The snake's shed skin is an exact symbol. It bears the mark of the body's former shape but is not itself a living creature. The characters distinguish appearance from reality only belatedly. Yet the symbol does not merely mean that dispelling illusion supplies a solution: the dream suggests that dispelling one illusion can open a new uncertainty. This final indeterminacy sets the story apart from a didactic animal tale. The writer does not give the reader a stable, satisfying answer.

5.3 Saritā's Awakening and a Woman's Fear of the Future

When the dream breaks, Saritā feels a hand upon her body: it is her husband's. At that moment she recalls the growing number of her children and their increasing needs. The narrative suddenly returns from an animal family to a human one. The old mouse, exposure to danger, and the struggle over resources do not become a direct moral instruction to human beings; they reverberate instead as the river of fear flowing within Saritā. The image of a 'flood' intensifies at the close: a previously flowing fear has suddenly risen in force.

To read the husband's touch exclusively as a sign of love, or exclusively as violence, would go beyond the evidence of the text. Saritā's response is associated with the disturbing memory and the weight of future responsibilities; the touch is linked to anxiety about a continuing increase in offspring. It therefore raises questions about unequal reproductive responsibilities within marriage, domestic resources, and women's independent will. Yet the narrative does not state Saritā's final decision; it depicts the intensification of fear. To preserve this unspoken dimension in criticism is to respect the work's openness.

In 'Rūsal Bauā', the embrace between father and son ultimately provides emotional reassurance; in 'Dokh Kekar', silence opens a path towards intimacy; in 'Ḍarak Nadī', bodily proximity itself accompanies a flood of fear. These three different endings challenge any attempt to contain family relationships within a single moral formula. The family is sometimes a place of shared suffering, sometimes a complicated court of obligation and memory, and sometimes the source of insecurity.

6. Narrative Arrangement: Scene, Dialogue, and the Weight of Endings

Each story opens a different sensory doorway. In 'Rūsal Bauā' the fair is a bright public scene; in 'Dokh Kekar' midnight and the husband's insistence that his wife eat open the way into private tension; in 'Ḍarak Nadī' a dream carries us into an unfamiliar world. The selection of scenes makes narrative time symbolic. The fair becomes a time of social display; the night, a time of unspoken guilt; and sleep, a time of inward uncertainty. Comparison of these three beginnings reveals the author's control of narration as well as his choice of subjects.

In 'Rūsal Bauā' the narrator constructs a bridge of sympathy between Phekan's helplessness and Bechū's response. Dialogue determines the story's movement, while description remains restricted. In 'Dokh Kekar' Dinesh's voice predominates: he tells the past in order to alter the present. His narration is not ethically neutral, for influencing his listening wife is itself the purpose of the character who narrates. In 'Ḍarak Nadī', the dialogue among mice within the dream returns us to Saritā's inner condition. Shifting narrative distance and point of view form the foundation of each work's meaning.

All three stories have a final reversal, but its tone varies. In the first, the child's words give his father support; in the second, the narrator-character's identity transforms the facts of an embedded story into an ethical question concerning present conduct; in the third, waking from the dream makes the real fear even stronger. The first two endings move towards emotional accommodation, while the third offers no secure prospect of reconciliation. In the light of this variation, it would be inappropriate to claim that all the stories offer the same kind of happy ending.

Genette's questions of order, duration, and narrative level apply concretely here: within a single day of the fair the long crisis of an agrarian economy is suggested; Dinesh's account compresses twenty-five years of memory into one present night; Saritā's brief dream opens onto an indefinite future. These contractions and expansions of time place the burden of social history within a short narrative body. Theory matters here not as a display of terminology but as a means of clarifying how the experience of time has been constructed in the text.

7. Vernacular Language, the Force of Utterance, and Social Voices

Mandal's language constructs relationships before it constructs scenes. In 'Rūsal Bauā', domestic questions, the names of objects at the fair, the vocabulary of

fields and weather, and the child's counter-questions evoke a familiar world of vernacular communication. Words that may seem ordinary from the standpoint of standard literary prose become precise instruments for revealing character and social position. Particularly after the account of deprivation, a single sentence thrown at Phekan proves weightier than the entire preceding description.

In 'Dokh Kekar', the opposition between 'the pain of food' and 'the pain of words' is not merely a folk saying but the story's experiential logic. An uncomplicated expression makes tangible the interrelationship of women's psychological suffering and material hardship. 'Exile', though borrowed from religious narrative, here names a disciplinary arrangement imposed upon a woman within domestic life; a familiar expression is reconstructed through family experience. At this point linguistic simplicity generates critical depth.

In 'Ḍarak Nadī', the mouse family's modes of speaking, teasing, deceptive reassurances, and mutual jostling lend dramatic force to the narrative. Respect, self-interest, irony, and threats inhabit the same linguistic world in the dialogue between the old mouse and his grandson. Such plurality can be read alongside Bakhtin's thinking on dialogue: what someone says is shaped by social position, audience, and intention. Yet these stories do not possess the expansive multilingual structure of a novel; Bakhtin's concept is consequently more appropriately used in a limited, functional sense.

A caution about craftsmanship must also be registered. At times the narrator offers events too little opportunity to speak for themselves, stating their meaning in direct moral aphorisms. For example, the old mouse's general injunction to struggle or the narrator's comments upon family suffering partially predetermine the reader's interpretation. Nevertheless, the urgency of the characters' voices prevents the stories from becoming wholly didactic. Above all, the ending of 'Ḍarak Nadī' reaches beyond the narrator's ostensible lesson and leaves fear unanswered.

8. Class, Gender, and Generation: Interconnections among the Three Stories

In the first story class difference is explicit—in landownership, government employment, and purchasing power. In the second, power operates less through economic indices than through rules governing gender and generation. In the third, family members expose an elder to risk for the sake of collective safety, while, on waking, a woman is beset by anxiety about her future household. What joins all three stories is that the family is not an innocent realm separate from society; it is also a site in which society's inequalities are reproduced.

In the first story the father is affectionate but has little economic capacity; in the second the son remembers his mother's sacrifice but does not fully open the question of securing justice for his wife; in the third the language of affection towards an elder gives way to self-interest when the need arises. Criticising the ideal of family in this way does not deny the possibilities of relationships. Mandal's characters are neither absolutely wicked nor absolutely virtuous; they

live with mixtures of love, dissatisfaction, and fear under compromised social circumstances.

It would also be wrong to impose uniformity upon the female characters. Bechū's mother gives bitter voice to economic scarcity; Dinesh's wife seeks redress for humiliation; the afflicted mother-in-law is a helpless woman of an earlier time; Saritā is an inward centre haunted by an uncertain future. These four positions cannot be accommodated in the single mould of a 'self-sacrificing woman'. Lanser's questions concerning viewpoint and ideological location are useful here: who can speak in the narrative, who listens to another's story, and whose suffering remains unspoken?

Old age and childhood are not merely opposed locations either. The child of 'Rūsal Bauā' comforts his father, whereas the grandson in 'Ḍarak Nadī' pushes an old man towards danger. This contrast shows that age does not determine ethical conduct by itself; the form of social relationships and control over resources are more decisive. In 'Dokh Kekar', the son narrates the older generation's suffering; in 'Ḍarak Nadī', the younger generation assesses the utility of its elders. The same intergenerational relation acquires different meanings in different narratives.

9. Artistic Achievements and Critical Limitations

The first achievement of these stories lies in their selection of subjects. Rather than locating social injustice in a courtroom, a movement, or a public declaration, the writer finds it in a household courtyard, a night-time bed, and a mouse's burrow within a dream. Larger systems enter these small spaces. The uncertainty of agricultural yields is felt in a child's request for clothes; dowry and the desire for a son in a woman's history of miscarriages; and the devaluation of elders in a family's collective decision. Brevity makes these multilayered suggestions possible.

A second achievement is the dramatic use of dialogue. Through familiar domestic speech, characters wound, protect, persuade, and deceive one another. The stories' social analysis arises not entirely from external commentary, but from contradictions in the characters' words. The child injured by consumer competition takes refuge in another kind of competition; the husband who explains his mother's pain does not fully allow his wife to restate her grievance; the family that honours an elder's experience endangers his life. The depiction of such self-contradictions makes these stories worth sustained discussion.

Their limits nevertheless require attention. The sympathetic ending of 'Rūsal Bauā' leaves the institutional causes of social inequality unresolved. The moving disclosure of identity in 'Dokh Kekar' offers no concrete settlement of the present mother-in-law–daughter-in-law conflict: it awakens moral sensitivity rather than restructuring relations of rights. In the third story the metaphor of fear is extremely effective, but Saritā's personal circumstances remain obscure, whether deliberately or because of the brevity of the form; the reader must infer

the source of her anxiety about the future. Part of this obscurity is an aesthetic strength, another part a limit upon social analysis.

To read the works only as moral lessons would be convenient for the reader but reductive of their literary complexity. Conversely, to dismiss every emotional resolution as deception would be equally one-sided. The writer's compassion arises from authentic experiences of the characters. Criticism must recognise the legitimacy of that compassion while identifying its ideological insufficiencies. Such a balance makes it unnecessary either to dissolve Mandal's fictional world in exaggerated praise or to confine it in the rigid categories of accusation.

10. Conclusion: Unspoken Questions Flowing with the Colours

In the three stories considered from *Triveṇīk Raṅg*, social problems are present not in overlooked corners but amid human intimacy. 'Rūsal Bauā' shows the fragile rebirth of self-respect in a household bearing the burden of economic inequality. 'Dokh Kekar' brings an older mother's suffering into the dialogue of present relationships, sharpening the questions of memory and justice. Through a dream, 'Ḍarak Nadī' brings together family self-interest, the insecurity of the elderly, and a woman's incomplete apprehension of the future. All three demonstrate the impossibility of separating social structures from private feeling.

The principal feature of Mandal's storytelling is the brief incident, recognisable vernacular speech, pressure within dialogue, and a sudden expansion of meaning at the end. This expansion does not always travel in the same direction: hope in the first, sympathy mediated by memory in the second, and intensifying fear in the third. The third story's uncertainty in particular compels us to reread the assurances of the first two. The reader understands that love and intimacy matter, but disparities of resources, gender injustice, and fear of abandonment cannot be dissolved by affection alone.

On the evidence of these three texts, it may be said that Mandal's short fiction asks the reader for compassion, but becomes most valuable when questions remain alive alongside that compassion. The child's courage, the mother's solitary ordeal, and Saritā's fear—these three distinct voices form a literary *Triveṇī* in which the ordinary language of home raises extraordinary questions of social justice.

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Vāpasī: The Irretrievability of Prestige and the Fracture of Relationships

A Text-Based Dramaturgical and Sociocultural Study of Rajdev Mandal's One-Act Play Collection Vāpasī

Abstract

Rajdev Mandal's collection of one-act plays entitled *Vāpasī* contains two works, 'Vāpasī' and 'Sambandh'. The first focuses on the conflicts among dowry greed, the prestige of related families, and self-recognition; the second on the identification of a long-lost brother, the reckoning of inheritance, and growing distrust within the family. This study argues that in both plays 'return' signifies not merely the reappearance of a person or the restitution of an object, but the difficult or impossible process of restoring ethical relationships. It closely examines subject matter, scenic arrangement, the ensemble of characters, the naturalness of language, stage cues, the ethical role of female characters, the interrelationship of property and honour, and the dramatic implications of the endings. Theoretical concepts concerning dramatic action, communication through dialogue, stage signs, and *rasa* and *bhāva* are adapted to the particular circumstances of the texts. Alongside the achievements of the collection's brevity, the resources of local speech, and moral irony, the evaluation also identifies limitations of occasional didacticism and one-dimensional dialogue.

Keywords: Maithili one-act plays; Rajdev Mandal; dowry; prestige; family relationships; inheritance; scenic structure; vernacular speech; dramatic ethics.

1. Introduction: Large Social Questions in a Short Dramatic Form

The artistry of a one-act play resides not in its small size but in the concentration of conflict, the interaction of characters, and the disciplined arrangement of scenic intervals. A short play often reveals, through one or a few restricted situations, a social pressure that a longer narrative might express at length. In *Vāpasī*, the writer fixes his attention on two fields of familial conduct: marriage ritual and ancestral property. In both, monetary transactions pass beyond law or custom to become tests of intimate relationships. The expectation of wealth is here not simply a material desire but a distorted measure of another person's human existence.

The collection's first work, 'Vāpasī', gradually develops domestic and social confrontation across four scenes; 'Sambandh' portrays, in three scenes, the blow dealt to fraternal affection by claims to property. Numbers of scenes are not in themselves a criterion of value. What matters is that changes of scene also alter the range of the question. In the first, a doorstep, a relative-by-marriage's house, part of Chandesar's home, and a crossroads become an expanding communal field of ethical decision; in the second, the succession of a front courtyard, a tea

stall at the village crossroads, and the front courtyard once more converts concealed domestic self-interest into public interrogation.

The method of this research rests on close reading of the original works, analysis of the interrelationship between characters' speech and stage directions, and comparative dramatic theory. A distinction has been maintained between the text's explicit statements and the critic's construction of meanings. 'Irretrievable prestige' and 'fractured relationships' are therefore not formulae written by the playwright, but interpretative conclusions of this study based upon situation, dialogue, and final outcome.

2. The Collection's Structure and Its Title

The collection bears the singular title *Vāpasī* ('Return'), yet from the standpoint of subject it becomes a shared emotional name for two different dramatic situations. In the first play, the dowry object owed can be returned, but the humiliation caused in its name and the loss of honour cannot simply be erased; in the second, a brother separated for years reaches the family home in person but finds no homecoming in affection. Thus in the first case 'giving back' and in the second 'coming back' acquire ethically unsuccessful meanings, enriching the title. This resemblance of meanings is constructed by the two endings actually present in the texts; there is no need to force the separate plots into one.

The language and dramatic design of *Vāpasī* establish a backdrop of contemporary rural life, but the work is not a documentary record of any particular historical event, movement, or locality. Its social world is made primarily of domestic relationships, village opinion, marriage prestige, partition of property, and clashing personal interests. The collection's essential contribution is the theatrical representation of moral complexity within this restricted setting, not a claim to chronicle the whole history of Maithili theatre.

3. 'Vāpasī': From the Transaction of Dowry to a Crisis of Prestige

3.1 The Opening Scene: The Seeds of Demand and Disagreement

The first scene opens at Pattīlāl's doorway. In a familiar address almost suggesting a fellow member of the same household, Lutīchan raises the question of preparations to visit the home of the relative by marriage. Pattīlāl's response quickly reveals contempt for that relative and dissatisfaction over dowry. What matters in the exchange is not merely that two characters supply information about an older dispute. From the beginning the audience sees that Pattīlāl understands the relationship not through respect or affection, but through the language of outstanding claims. Lutīchan's objections place the first question mark against Pattīlāl's social position.

Lutīchan does more than provide the information expected of a neighbour. He voices an ethical objection to Pattīlāl's decisions from within the community itself. In Pattīlāl's speech are calculations of what remains 'due' and 'to be given'; in Lutīchan's are appeals to visiting and behaving properly towards family. This

linguistic opposition opens the nature of the conflict. Without staging any special catastrophe, the author places two kinds of moral economy face to face.

3.2 The Affinal Home: Tension through Absence and Memory

The second scene unfolds at Chandesar's home. The anticipation of Pattīlāl's arrival and information concerning family grief redirect what had seemed a linear confrontation. Through Surakhbā comes news of the relative's absence. The design of characters creates a meaningful dramatic effect: the person who has occupied the centre of critical dialogue and transactions becomes more acutely missed because he is absent. The insistence upon meeting and the impossibility of the meeting stand in opposition.

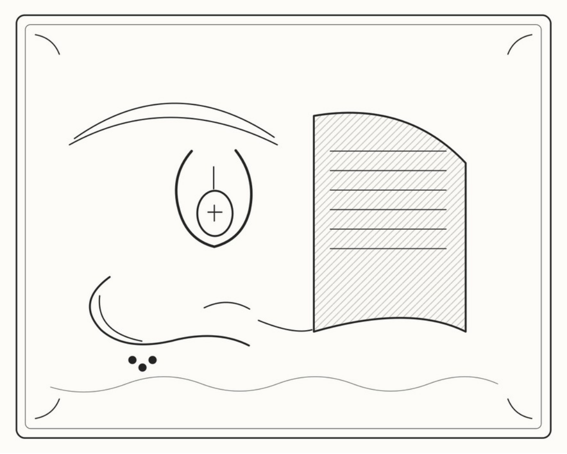
Pattīlāl's language of self-prestige sounds uncomfortable in this atmosphere of mourning. The play seems to ask what place remains for an old monetary account in the face of death, affection, and grief in the family linked by marriage. The writer does not answer immediately. Its consequences are prepared through Pattīlāl's anger and the objections arising within the household in the following scenes. This delay presents the appetite for dowry not as a momentary impulse but as an enduring disposition.

3.3 Objection within the Household: Generations and the Role of Women

The third scene is set in a portion of Chandesar's home. Alongside Surakhbā and Lutīchan, dissent from within the family now grows stronger in Pattīlāl's presence. Pattīlāl voices dissatisfaction at not receiving what was due and raises the question of a 'gold earring'. After Kantalāl and Phūlodey enter, the centre of the dispute shifts from an ornament to the moral structure of married life.

In the very insistence that Pattīlāl takes for a defence of his rights or honour, his son's marriage, the daughter-in-law's self-respect, and trust between two families are being injured. Kantalāl distances himself from his father's demand; Phūlodey likewise refuses to make the monetary object the ultimate arbiter. Although the writer retains the conventional arrangement in which men speak more frequently in disputes over family and property, Phūlodey's intervention is decisive. Far from being a passive emblem of forbearance, she presents an active moral argument and agrees to the proposal to return the gold.

There is a moving contradiction in this scene: as the material object diminishes, its symbolic weight increases. The 'earring' is ostensibly an ornament, but within the play it becomes a composite sign of the dowry system, patriarchal decisions, the formation of generational values, and crises of prestige. It can function as a visible stage prop, while its significance extends beyond the scene into social conventions.



The disputed gold earring: a small object carrying the weight of prestige

3.4 The Decisive Crossroads Scene: Return of the Object, Not of Honour

The fourth scene is situated at the crossroads. Pattīlāl initially tries to preserve the moral justification of his demand, but he cannot readily dismiss the remarks of Ghoṅghāy and Chaṭpaṭiyā. As the conversation unfolds, Kantalāl and Phūlodey enter and word arrives that the gold is being returned. Pattīlāl's final response discloses the one-act play's central meaning: 'But my prestige cannot be returned.' This line establishes the difference between external restitution and inward social injury.

It would be inadequate to treat this ending as a simple story of a person who has 'reformed'. Pattīlāl does not declare that he has entirely renounced greed; he particularly acknowledges the loss of prestige. Remorse, shame, and self-centred regret can all be read together in this admission. The play's social criticism derives its severity from this complexity: a material object can be given back, but the rebuilding of public trust is no natural consequence of that act.

The crossroads, an ordinary place of village movement, becomes a stage for public moral judgment. The supposed 'domestic matter' of dowry is revealed before the community. Instead of the potential violence of village gossip, the writer activates communal consciousness through dialogue. Yet the remarks of Chaṭpaṭiyā and Ghoṅghāy also carry the pressure of public comment; the community is therefore not merely a force for justice, but also a participant in the production of honour and dishonour.

4. 'Sambandh': A Brother's Identity, Property Rights, and the Failure of Affection

4.1 The First Scene: Anxiety over Partition

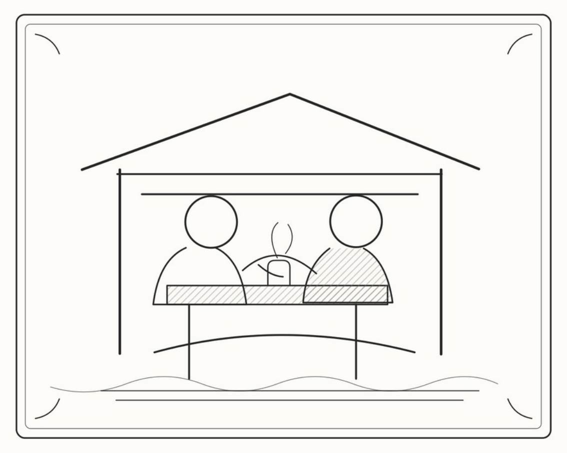
'Sambandh' opens in Lakhpatiyā's front courtyard. Lakhpatiyā is troubled by the prospect of giving his brother a share of ancestral property. His conversation with Phulchan soon makes clear that the dispute concerns not only land and possessions, but the increasingly 'expensive' social price of brotherhood. Within the family, the languages of illness, internal conflict, and affection are continually displaced by the language of monetary shares. The author initially presents Lakhpatiyā's self-interest in the guise of normal conduct; later scenes disclose its true nature.

At the outset the play does not supply the reader with any omniscient certificate of truth. Phulchan's memory, Lakhpatiyā's apprehension, and past events form its informational background. Such restricted information is a useful instrument of dramatic suspicion: is the missing person truly returning, or is popular rumour inflaming anxieties over property? The play seeks to answer this question through the characters' tests of mutual recognition.

4.2 The Second Scene: Memory and Recognition at the Village Crossroads

The second scene occurs at a tea shop at the village crossroads. Leṭaru Kākā brings a man with him and introduces him as Lakhpatiyā's brother, Jagu Baukū. The reactions of Bhunesar, Kamlesh, Phulchan, and other villagers illuminate the nature of a village's collective memory. The suggestion that an accident changed the man's face destabilises the visible signs of identification; conversation, recollection, and older marks now acquire greater importance.

Leṭaru Kākā acts as a keeper of the village's older knowledge of people. By connecting Baukū's wounds, the years elapsed, and his wanderings beyond the village, he tries to secure social recognition for his identity. But communal confidence cannot guarantee a change in the interests of a powerful family. Through him, the play distinguishes public verification from private self-interest: a person recognised by village memory may still be denied acceptance by the master of his home.



The crossroads tea shop: communal memory and contested recognition

The choice of a tea shop is significant. It is a meeting place of labour, roads, rumour, and communal discussion. As at the crossroads in the first one-act play, an inner domestic issue becomes the object of public consultation. Here, however, the process of establishing public recognition does not turn into a welcome within the family, and this discrepancy gradually deepens the pathos of 'Sambandh'.

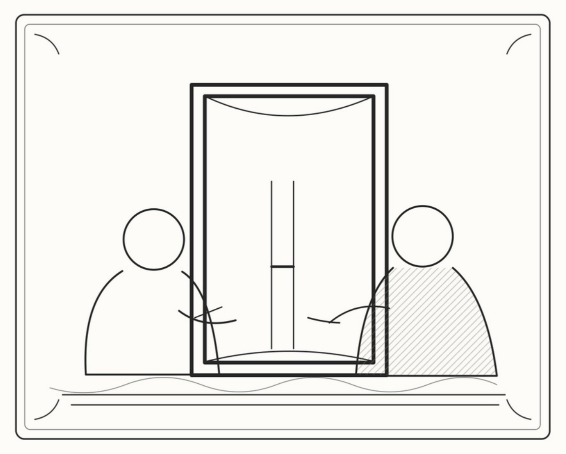
4.3 The Third Scene: A Conflict of Identity and an Open Ending

The third scene returns to Lakhpatiyā's front courtyard. Chhiṭkīvālī arrives with the news that his brother has come to the village. Lakhpatiyā responds with suspicion and accusation, not welcome. Baukū announces who he is, but Lakhpatiyā calls him an 'impostor' and accuses him of mounting a supposed performance. The suggestion of a play within the play becomes an ironic point: who is actually acting—Baukū, whose appearance was changed by an accident, or Lakhpatiyā, who performs disbelief in order to deny the relationship?

Baukū displays the scar from the accident and recounts memories of his earlier life. The entrance of Dukhnī Dāy introduces maternal memory and an undercurrent of compassion. Yet Lakhpatiyā's behaviour reveals that fear of dividing the property has already affected his judgment. Baukū expresses a wish to meet his own brother rather than to obtain wealth. His eventual decision to leave reveals the horrifying implication of selfish refusal: the one who most needs a refuge of affection is sent away again from his own home.

The final scene is deeply affecting. Phulchan again attempts to reason with Baukū, but Baukū says that he came searching for his brother and will now depart. In this rejected return neither political nor legal justice is completed; familial tragedy takes its place. Baukū's wounded appeal and Dukhnī's lament leave the play on an open ethical question. A relationship that ought to rest upon

bodily presence, memory, and mutual recognition becomes subordinate to the fear of having to share property.



The threshold: a brother returns only to be denied belonging

5. The Two One-Act Plays' Common Centre: Wealth, Honour, and the Conflict of Affection

The resemblance in the two plays' moral structures is clear. Pattīlāl desires a dowry object in 'Vāpasī'; Lakhpatiyā wishes to avoid the possible division of property in 'Sambandh'. In the first, the loss of prestige proves greater than the desired object; in the second, the value of brotherly affection emerges as greater than the property someone seeks to preserve. One character wants to regulate a relationship through transactions; the other wants to abolish a relationship by denying a right. Both attempts ultimately tear intimate life apart.

Yet it would be no more just to turn the two plays into moral exempla of 'two characters, two faults'. Pattīlāl's words reflect the familiar pressure of social prestige; Lakhpatiyā's words contain an argument of fear arising from inheritance. The plays' subtler achievement is that the characters do not openly justify selfishness as wrongdoing; rather, they attempt to legitimise it as ordinary social practice. Because of this self-justification, their dramatic faults, though personal, appear connected with social structures.

The writer does not make dowry and ancestral property identical legal questions; their conjunction is justified by ethical purpose. A dowry demand brings humiliation into a marriage relationship; the monopolisation of property destroys trust between brothers. In both, money becomes a medium through which intimacy is turned into an instrument. Instead of a social foundation, the family becomes a site for the satisfaction of economic claims.

6. Scene, Time, and Place: The Discipline of Dramatic Action

In terms of plot, both works employ restricted scenic arrangements. A few domestic places, one public crossroads, daytime settings, and brief indications of changes of scene suffice for the writer to reveal the changing forms of relationship. Stage directions organise entrances and exits, seating, reactions, gestures, expressions, and open confrontation. The language of staging is not excessively ornamental; it makes the central action intelligible to actor and director.

Manfred Pfister emphasises the multilayered relationship of communication between dramatic text and theatrical presentation. Viewed thus, the doorway, seats, movements back and forth, and collective entrances in 'Vāpasī' are not merely literary descriptions but signals that alter proximity and distance among actors. The progression in 'Sambandh' from the front courtyard to the tea shop and back forms a circle: an intimate space subjected to public testing and then to intimate rejection. Nevertheless, ultimate claims about performance cannot be made from the written text alone: acting, pauses, movement of the ensemble, and spatial construction play independent roles in staging.

The claim of one-act concentration must be tested against the internal meaning of the scenes. The first two scenes of 'Vāpasī' may seem equivalent to a lengthy exposition; its principal moral conflict becomes more effective in the third and fourth. In 'Sambandh', the public examination of identity in the second scene gives relatively extensive space to narrative information. Without that informational background, however, the poignancy of rejection in the third scene would have been diminished. Some passages thus stand on the boundary between dramatic necessity and expository burden.

7. The Language of Dialogue: Vernacular Speech, Irony, and Characterisation

The major strength of Rajdev Mandal's dialogue is the naturalness drawn from spoken dialect. Forms of address, mutual interruptions, questions and answers, harsh remarks, hesitation, and expressions born of vernacular experience together create the characters' world. The characters do not deliver learned discourses; they speak to achieve immediate objectives. Pattīlāl's harsh tone and Lutīchan's objections, Lakhpatiyā's accusations and Baukū's defence of identity produce a theatrical tension distinct from a linear moral essay.

Dramatic dialogue differs from ordinary conversation because it addresses the characters in a scene on one level and shapes the audience's understanding on another. Read in light of Pfister's analysis of dramatic communication, the episode of the 'earring' in 'Vāpasī' informs readers of a social injustice even as the characters calculate their own interests and losses. In 'Sambandh', the repeated name 'Baukū', bodily scars, and address as 'brother' establish his claim to identity in the audience's memory while Lakhpatiyā rejects it.

At some points, moral judgments are expressed in highly explicit language. This heightens the sharpness of the message on a popular stage, but from the standpoint of literary subtlety it occasionally reduces the audience's space for constructing meaning. Especially towards the end, characters explain their ethical positions directly. This limitation is connected with the works' social purpose; despite such linearity, the local cadence of the dialogue keeps it alive.

8. The Structure of Characters: Individual, Community, and Dissent

Pattīlāl occupies the centre of the first play, but his character is incomplete without Kantalāl, Phūlodey, Lutīchan, Ghoṅghāy, and Chaṭpaṭiyā. They carry different moral perspectives. The pressure of self-interest in Pattīlāl, generational resistance in Kantalāl, humane restraint in Phūlodey, the proprieties of kinship in Lutīchan, and the comments of village opinion collectively determine the play's judgment. Rather than the mind of a single hero, a dialogic ensemble is its governing force.

In the conflict between Lakhpatiyā and Baukū in the second play, Leṭaru Kākā, Bhunesar, Kamlesh, Phulchan, Dukhnī Dāy, and Chhiṭkīvālī serve in turn as instruments of evidence, information, memory, and feeling. Some characters are prominent less for distinct psychological development than for their functional role in the situation. This is natural in the brief form of a one-act play; yet if a performance gives all the characters identical bodily language and delivery, the community risks becoming merely a chorus.

Comparison of Dukhnī Dāy and Phūlodey reveals two different energies of female characterisation. Phūlodey is an active moral mediator who accepts the solution of returning the disputed object; Dukhnī's suffering gives body and voice to the tragedy of ruptured relationships. Yet in both plays the public arena of decision remains primarily under male control. Women's voices express their predicament, while the structural rules of property remain male-centred. This contradiction may be seen as both a possibility and a limit of the work's social criticism.

9. Reading through Indian and Modern Theories of Drama

Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* separately discusses *rasa*, *bhāva*, acting, dramatic genres, and the arrangement of dramatic material. Rather than mechanically imposing the theory of *rasa*, one may observe that in 'Vāpasī' the sequence of shame, indignation, and moral guilt produces a critical compassion in the audience, whereas in 'Sambandh' a progression of hope, suspicion, rejection, and separation intensifies compassion. Thus the two plays do not uniformly enlarge a single emotion; they offer changing combinations of feeling from scene to scene.

Aristotle's analysis of drama takes the ordering of action and events, distinct from the description of character traits, as a basis of analysis. The narrative movement of 'Vāpasī' can be traced as greed–protest–restitution of the object–regret over prestige; that of 'Sambandh' as self-interest–information–recognition–rejection–departure. In each progression, the final event gives a

newly constructed meaning to the original situation: gain through dowry becomes loss of prestige, and security of property becomes separation from a brother. Such contrary outcomes demonstrate the structural power of dramatic action; it is unnecessary to judge these works by mechanically applying the normative standards of Greek tragedy.

Pfister's discussion of the interdependence of character and action is especially helpful here. Pattīlāl's self-interest reappears in decisions after his statements; Lakhpatiyā's fear moves from suspicious questions to outright rejection. Character thus emerges from the development of conduct, not merely from announcements of fault. Patrice Pavis's vocabulary of theatrical signs likewise helps us understand how the gold, the scar from an accident, the doorway, and the crossroads become meaningful stage signs.

Raymond Williams's reading of literary images of country and city supplies a useful critical background for refusing the simplistic opposition of 'pure village versus corrupt city'. Village relationships in 'Vāpasī' are not automatically sacred: the same social setting reproduces dowry demands, proprietary self-interest, and humiliation. The collective voice certainly offers the possibility of objection, but if village society is treated as a self-evident ethical ideal, the writer's actual criticism is obscured.

10. Dramatic Irony and the Resonance of the Title

At the close of the first one-act play, Pattīlāl speaks of the impossibility of the 'return of prestige'. In this sentence, 'return' changes from a material action into an ethical impossibility. In the second play, the title 'Sambandh' ('Relationship') undergoes a semantic reversal at the end: the relationship that a man comes to reaffirm is denied within the household itself. Because of their endings, both titles prompt the audience to reread the opening scenes.

Here the writer does not locate suffering in a calamity sent by divine power. Pattīlāl's standing is diminished by his own greedy conduct; Lakhpatiyā's fraternal relationship breaks through his own fearful decision. The plays thus ask whether the causes of social destruction are not merely accident or economic deprivation, but also people's ethical choices. In 'Sambandh', an accident alters the body, yet it is the decision to reject that destroys affection: the differentiation of these two levels is a substantial achievement of the play.

11. Readerly Achievements and Artistic Limitations

The collection's notable achievements fall into four areas: constructing intelligible conflict within restricted scenic arrangements; employing living Maithili vernacular; turning a dispute over objects into questions of affection and prestige; and using a final utterance or action to reverse the moral meaning of preceding events. The playwright does not neglect the social immediacy of his subject. Dowry, greed, division of property, and public village debate are presented in forms communicable on stage.

Its limitations also require critical mention. In many situations characters appear arranged as clearly defined advocates or opponents, so multilayered psychological development of their contradictions receives less space. Some dialogue states the social message openly, with the result that the audience hears a conclusion rather than reaching it independently. Near the climaxes of the one-act plays, the urgency of conversation becomes excessive; at such moments the possibilities of pause, silence, and unstated tension might have been enlarged.

Although moving, the ending of 'Sambandh' does not complete the social process of the property dispute. The play depicts Baukū's humiliation and departure but offers no final adjudication of his legal rights. It would be inappropriate to describe this as a necessary defect of plot, for the work seeks to reveal moral failure. Nevertheless, a reader approaching it through social realism is left asking where practical resistance to injustice went, even after the group's moral support. This unanswered question extends the play's critical resonance.

Similarly, the return of the gold earring in 'Vāpasī' does not itself complete an institutional critique of dowry. Personal apology or shame cannot substitute for reconstruction of a social custom. Yet through Pattīlāl's final self-acknowledgment the play certainly demonstrates that accounts of humiliation differ from accounts of objects. Such an outcome maintains the tension between the optimism of social reform and the painful reality of lasting injury.

12. Conclusion

To dismiss Rajdev Mandal's *Vāpasī* as two brief stories of domestic instruction would diminish its dramatic significance. In both one-act plays, home and village are not merely backgrounds but places where human social identity is put to the test. In the first, the self-interest of dowry can restore a gold object but not prestige; in the second, the self-interest of property cannot restore brotherly affection even in the physical presence of a sibling. Through this parallel irony, the collection's title acquires its most consequential meaning.

The language of the collection is local, its conflicts direct, its stage directions concise, and its endings provocative. Occasional overt moralising by the characters and a limited psychological complexity raise questions about its aesthetics, but its capacity to produce ethical shock through the gestures of vernacular life is significant. For readers of Maithili one-act plays, the book deserves attention particularly because it transforms 'return' from a merely physical occurrence into the fragile possibility of social trust and the rights of affection.

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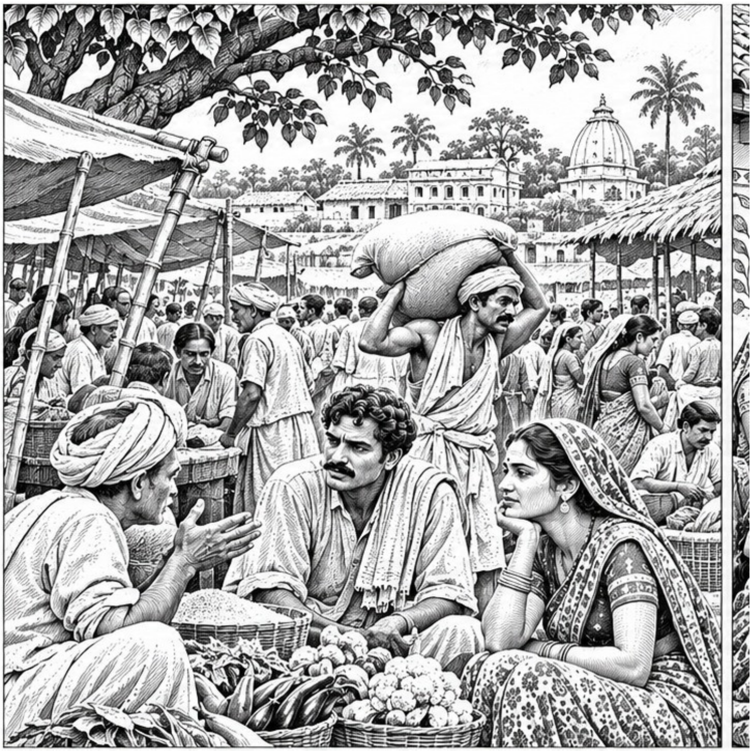
Nit Naval: Shiv Kumar Prasad

Manak Hāṭ: Self-Experience, Folk Consciousness, and Contemporary Maithili Poetry



An Extended Literary and Critical Study of Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad's Poetry Collection

Abstract

Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad's Manak Hāṭ fashions a world of contemporary Maithili poetry in which individual sensibility and the life of the people continually enter one another. The silence of the mind, the intimacy of love, the disintegration of family relationships, memories of the ancestral village and homestead, the insecurity of working people, political irony, and the fear of the pandemic are distinct subjects, yet become diverse expressions of one human consciousness. Close readings of the darkness and light in the title poem, the writerly self-affirmation of 'Manukh', the ethical enquiry of 'Anuttarit Praśna', the familial conflict of 'Toṛi Le Sineh', the class-inflected compassion of 'Maratai Garībahe', and the satire of 'Nāk' show that the poet's most important achievement is to raise questions of public life in the language of everyday social conduct. A

comparative examination of apostrophe, interrogation, recurrence, brief lines, pictorial imagery, and direct statement also reveals the unevenness of the collection's artistry. In several poems, semantic openness, living images, and rhythm activate the reader; in others, conventional similes and hasty moral conclusions diminish poetic density. Manak Hāṭ must therefore be judged not solely by its socially committed subject matter but also by the creative capacities of its language and figurative form.

Keywords: contemporary Maithili poetry; Manak Hāṭ; mental landscape; folk life; social inequality; poetic language; the coronavirus period; poetic craft; textual criticism.

1. Introduction: The Privacy of the Mind and the Shared World of the People

The title Manak Hāṭ itself offers a critical indication. The 'mind' is the source of inward pain, hope, recollection, images, and desire; the 'market' is a place of diverse people, things, voices, bargaining, and social exchange. Their conjunction establishes the collection's intellectual direction: inwardness does not remain detached from the people, and public life continually enters the mind. To call it simply a 'book of sentimental verse' would diminish its public sensitivity. The market-image does not appear once in the title and then disappear; many poems make the co-presence of diverse voices of happiness and sorrow, love and separation, family, labour, epidemic, and society their subject.

The combination of 'mind' and 'market' is especially significant. The former names solitary experience, memory, longing, and doubt; the latter, public encounter, movement, exchange, and a plurality of voices. Bringing them together, the poet extends the boundaries of subjective experience. A market exchanges not only goods but also people's suffering, expectations, relationships, and dealings; similarly, the mind in this collection moves beyond private grief to take in the experience of collective life. The recurring darkness and light of the title poem give this opposition a form. Darkness does not lessen the importance of light; on the contrary, it makes light's necessity and ethical significance subjects for enquiry.

To understand this poetic world, an inventory of themes is insufficient. We must ask which images contain the poet's social experience, where assertion becomes question, what relationships are produced by address, and where repetition creates rhythm or weakens an effect. Love and resistance do not occupy separate chambers here. When affection breaks down, a social arrangement becomes visible; when hunger intrudes, the insecurity of family life emerges; and images of nature transform private states of mind.

2. The Creative Background of the Poems and a Critical Approach

In 'Pothīk Māde' ('About the Book'), the poet appears to leave the right to evaluate his writing with readers and critics. This modest acknowledgement indicates a view of literature not as a closed verdict but as an open dialogue. The volume gathers experiences of different periods; its creative unity must accordingly be assessed through connections among themes and sensibilities,

not chronological uniformity. The attachment of love, human trust, the sorrows of life, and social discontent inhabit the same poetic voice. The circumstances of the first publication bring this creative multiplicity together, but the volume's artistic significance must be decided by the poems actually before the reader.

The tone of 'Pothīk Māde' proposes a sympathetic relationship between poet and reader. The writer does not presume that a poem's subject or emotional truth constitutes final proof of its beauty. In the opening poem 'Manukh', the persistence of 'continuing to write' extends this creative impulse. Writing here does not mean withdrawal from life, but re-experiencing sorrow, joy, and ordinary scenes. The poetic speaker becomes a witness to experience while aspiring to transform that experience into something shared with the reader.

An account of the collection's production of meaning ought to consider together the relation between words and experience, the polysemy of imagery, the dramatic effect of address, the rhythmic work of recurrence, and the transformation of social concerns into poetry. The linguistic history of contemporary Maithili poetry supplies a larger background, but the poem itself remains the primary object. A declaration in favour of social justice does not automatically become a successful poem; nor is a simple love lyric weak merely because it is simple. Both require judgement at the levels of diction, pause, image, and emotional movement.

The collection contains several poems titled simply 'Śīrṣak' ('Title'), and more than one bearing the title 'Coronā Kāl'. The first creates an editorial difficulty: distinct sensibilities disappear beneath a common designation. The second permits the same historical crisis to be viewed from several centres of experience. An undifferentiated title can obstruct memory and identification, but recurrence of a subject can become poetic repetition when it creates a new experience. The poems themselves must decide between those possibilities.

3. 'Manukh' and the Ethical Affirmation of Poetry

In the opening poem 'Manukh', the speaker narrates his continuing practice of writing as a form of self-account. Alongside personal affliction appear flowers, fragrance, the sand, water and stones of the village, dreams, hope, and the image of a broken mind. 'Manukh' here is not merely a biological individual, but a person who feels, breaks, writes again, and searches for possibility. At the outset writing is an act of subjective experience; by the end, experience has become a question of shared life.

The poet does not turn grief into ornamental pathos alone; within suffering he perceives a possibility of hope. At the same time, much of 'Manukh' is declarative: the poet tells us that he has continued to write, see, and seek. Such direct self-narration has a readerly intimacy, yet at certain moments it translates experience into interpretation before that experience can become an image. Its emotional truth remains clear, while the aesthetic possibility of double meaning may be restricted. This limitation can also be observed in several later poems.

Human dignity forms the ethical centre of this poetic vision. In 'Jinigīk Sāṃs', a succession of feelings—pride, love, strength, confidence, faith—becomes the breath of human life. Short lyric lines release experience from the heavy vocabulary of theory. Yet the direct succession of near-synonymous emotional words reduces pictorial force. A reader grasps the meaning at once, but successive readings do not necessarily disclose new layers with equal intensity.

4. The Title Poem: Darkness, Light, and the Market of the Mind

The title poem 'Manak Hāṭ' rests upon a recurring question. Amid night and darkness, with the fragrance of morning held inwardly, together with imagination and life, the poet repeatedly asks about fidelity to illumination. The returning question is the poem's dynamic centre. Darkness ceases to be merely an external natural condition and becomes a possible sign of existential despair, social fear, or the blockage of sensibility; light, in turn, becomes an emblem of ethical action, resilience, and the will to live. The poem constructs this plurality of symbolic meanings through its own interrogative form.

A distinctive feature is the address 'ahāṃ' ('you'). The rhythmic question is not merely a soliloquy: it posits an imagined interlocutor and creates dialogue. The 'you' may be an apprehensive individual or the community at large; in reply the speaker insists upon possibility and light. This dialogic character clarifies the concept of the market: the mind is not a solitary chamber but a public forum that also makes room for dissent. The rhythm of questions creates a brief yet effective argument against social obstruction.

Two other brief poems collected under the generic title 'Śīrṣak' express sensibility, love, patience, the meaningfulness of life, and aspiration towards the sky. Within this family of ideas, the title poem gains particular poetic density because it moves beyond aphorism to stage a collision among situation, question, and symbol. The collection is strongest where the poet does not instruct readers but compels them to consider for themselves the justification for light within darkness.

5. Love, the Body, Affection, and the Multiple Dimensions of Relationship

In 'Ṛturāj', flowers, fragrance, season, love, and colour are mutually consonant. 'Kājar' makes the eye and a delicate object of adornment an entrance into love, while 'Sukhasambal' generates its particular poetic tension from name, form, redness, and familiar images of life. In this sequence love remains a personal emotion, although its linguistic and pictorial resources come from local everyday experience. Here love celebrates intimacy rather than vast abstraction.

The poetic construction of 'Sambandh' is relatively more complex. Inward fondness and belonging are read together with the struggle of circumstance and states of mind. Family ceases to be a mechanical rule and becomes the outcome of shared time, acceptance, and neglect. 'Toṛi Le Sineh' gives this inward tension a social form. Childhood, the courtyard, marriage, divisions within the home, and the rupture of relationships indicate that affection is not simply a feeling in

the mind but an experience formed—and sometimes broken—within the arrangements of household and family.

Throughout the collection, the flowering of love and recurrent pain travel together. 'Dulār' demonstrates the linguistic cohesion of attachment, while in 'Nahi Kichu Lāgai Nīk' private sorrow renders ordinary sources of happiness ineffective. The transition between these states is an achievement. Yet familiar comparisons involving flowers, the moon, eyes, beauty, colour, and fragrance recur in many love poems; the distinctive imagery of separate compositions can consequently become blurred. Emotional authenticity and originality of imagery are not identical, and that distinction must be maintained.

6. Psychological Conflict: The Arrested Mind, Daybreak, and the Ancestral Homestead

'Bitait Bhinsar' holds the advance of time and personal agitation within an image of morning. Daybreak usually signifies a fresh beginning, but the verb 'passing' in the title adds transience to hope. 'Man' makes the uncertainty of an inward condition apparent: the mind is arrested, utterance is constrained, and inward doubt becomes mental instability. The poet departs here from his familiar optimism to evoke obstruction, fear, trembling, and disquiet.

In 'Canramā Nahi Banihen', the moon as a symbol of beauty becomes the medium of a conflict between social expectation and self-protection. To take the statement either as a one-dimensional feminist proclamation or as nothing more than a playful exchange in love would restrict the subtlety of the textual relationship. One may properly say that an individual's autonomous position emerges against the demand to become an ideal. The poem alone, however, does not furnish sufficient grounds to declare the speaker's social location and gender context established facts.

In 'Apan Ḍīh', an awareness of roots, home, and regional belonging creates a sense of spatial identity. The poem makes possible a reading in which those compelled by circumstance to leave continue to carry the shape of their birthplace inwardly. The ḍīh is not merely property: it appears as the memory of home, the family's place, and the sign of one's existence. The image derives its strength from the precision of a local word; compared with the abstraction 'displacement', ḍīh becomes a more tangible poetic sign.

7. Folk Life, Labour, and Poetic Evidence of Class Inequality

'Anuttarit Praśna' ('Unanswered Question') is structured around interrogation. Patterns of conduct between generations, father–son relations, labour, and unequal opportunities in life come into conflict. Instead of furnishing a clear answer, the poem displays its absence; interrogation therefore becomes a source of ethical discomfort. The poet puts before readers a matter requiring reconsideration: the distribution of work and authority that passes as normal within the home must itself undergo scrutiny.

'Maratai Garībahe' is a more direct poetic account of social inequality. Rural deprivation, need, food, the insecurity associated with work, and both the attraction and suffering of the city form parts of a larger social landscape. The grammar of the title matters: its emphasis on 'the poor' draws attention not to one person's mood but to social death or the unequal distribution of continuous destruction. Rather than stopping at the general moral statement that poverty brings suffering, the poem joins situations and experiences in a sequence that intensifies feeling.

The account of poverty may be read alongside the ironic possibilities of the title 'Katek Sukh Chai' ('How Much Happiness There Is'). Between ordinary relationships and scarcity, happiness can no longer possess a single definition. The poem weighs the value of small joys, domestic life, and hope; in this context the suffering of the poor is not an inert spectacle of karuṇa rasa but an ethical question. The poems about class inequality are strongest when particular scenes of social reality, family narratives, or local words play a structural role. Their impact diminishes when they depend only upon general moral conclusions.

The history of modern Maithili literature has repeatedly raised questions concerning small publishers, alternative communities of readers, and print culture. Pranav Prakash's study offers a historical instance in which cheap printed literature produced by a writer from a marginalised community failed to receive its due place in literary history. It would be mistaken to treat that research as evidence of a direct influence on Manak Hāṭ. Nevertheless, it supplies a methodological reason to attend to folk narrative, small presses, working people's experience, and non-metropolitan readerships when evaluating a poetic world.

8. State, Power, and Ethical Criticism

A poem entitled 'Śīrṣak', concerned with the acquisition of rule and power, takes a satirical view of civic relationships. The suggestion of the 'game of kingship and power' depicts government as play or opportunism rather than public responsibility. Short, direct sentences make the political irony immediately legible. Titles such as 'Rājnītik Sāṃp' and 'Sāṃp' similarly illustrate the collection's penchant for political metaphor. Yet the image of the snake does not always analyse complex relationships of power; at times it remains a familiar emblem of 'bad politics'.

The collection's final poem, 'Nāk' ('Nose'), uses a small part of the body as a sign of honour, pride, and social conduct. In Maithili idiom, the nose bears several meanings associated with dignity, self-respect, and prestige. By extending the familiar expression, the poet interrogates displays of social standing. A book that begins within the mind arrives at a questioning of the outward performance of human prestige; between beginning and ending there emerges a possible circle of meaning.

Two tendencies coexist in the poet's social criticism: figurative expression and explicit commentary. Images of political snakes, the marketplace, the nose, prison, lamps, and darkness make social complexities visible; an immediate judgement that 'such-and-such is bad', by contrast, closes meaning too quickly. To regard the collection as a coherent political manifesto would exceed the literary evidence. It is more fitting to read it as a succession of poetic moments of social dissent.

9. The Coronavirus Period: Home, Fear, Labour, and Insecurity

Several poems entitled 'Coronā Kāl' make the pandemic an immediate poetic subject. Confinement within the home, transformations in the life of crossroads and markets, the vulnerability of children and elders, livelihoods, broken sociability, spreading fear, and the interruption of daily routines become visible in these compositions. They give words not merely to an abstract fear of disease but to impediments and helplessness in ordinary life. The pandemic is thus more than a historical period; it is also a transformed experience of the human body, relationships, and labour.

In one of the longer pandemic poems, family members are restricted to the home; familiar patterns of markets, movement, and meeting others collapse. Because of this social obstruction, the poem also becomes an account of psychological tension, waiting, restlessness, and mutual dependence. Read with 'Maratai Garībahe', these poems reveal a health emergency and economic inequality as different faces of the same social horizon. The proximity of these adverse conditions enlarges the field of social compassion.

The question of artistic method in these pandemic poems needs explicit attention. When converting immediately contemporary, news-like scenes into poetry, the writer confronts two risks: simplifying facts and restricting the range of imagery. Many lines here approach direct description; their value as emotional documentation is therefore substantial, although at points their artistic transformation is less developed. Nevertheless, living everyday speech and the crisis within the household give them significance as social testimony. To assign every poem the same aesthetic rank would not be a just critical judgement.

10. Nature, Environment, and the Interdependence of Life

Nature is not merely a decoration of seasonal colours for this poet. In 'Ṛturāj' its beauty becomes the impulse of love, while 'Prakṛt' brings forward concern for the mutual relations among trees, flowers, water, sun, soil, and living beings. The movement from material experience to dependence among forms of life makes environmental consciousness tangible. The poet does not assume humanity to be a supreme being apart from nature; he insists upon interconnection and coexistence.

A title such as 'Paryāvaraṇ-Surakṣā' indicates his awareness of environmental concerns. Yet announcing an environmental purpose is not by itself enough to make a fine poem. In 'Prakṛt', relations between humanity and living beings,

vegetation, and the familiar domestic world assume more concrete form. The importance of nature is powerfully conveyed when it ceases to be a subject for instruction and becomes a scene of interdependence, affection, loss, and protection.

The local quality of Prasad's sense of nature derives from his vocabulary and world of objects. Flowers, soil, seasons, and trees are not simply pictorial embellishments but bearers of human feeling. Sometimes they intensify the impulses of love; sometimes they awaken a longing for balance. Nature is most vivid where poetic emotion and the material world cooperate, investing familiar scenes with extraordinary intimacy.

11. Poetic Form: Short Lyrics, Enumeration, Repetition, and Interrogative Rhythm

The forms in Manak Hāṭ are not uniform. Relatively short poems such as 'Kājar', 'Man', 'Kavitā', and 'Nāk' appear alongside the more expansive 'Manukh', 'Toṛi Le Sineh', 'Maratai Garībahe', and 'Coronā Kāl', as well as pieces entitled 'Gīt' ('Song'). Throughout the collection one encounters folk-song-like rhythms of the line, the return of a sound, apostrophe, and a tendency towards final pronouncement. Even where lines are arranged in free verse, a rhythm approaching song can be heard.

Recurrence is an effective formal device here. The return of the question in 'Manak Hāṭ' draws readers into an enquiry opposed to darkness; the insistent repetition of 'Maratai Garībahe' makes social pain a musical memory; the repeated title 'Coronā Kāl' may become a shared name for the pandemic's returning hardships. Yet repetition succeeds only when each reappearance adds a new circumstance, implication, or irony. Reiteration without an enlargement of meaning diminishes poetic energy.

The extremely brief piece 'Kavitā' ('Poetry') offers an interesting self-reflexive comment. In a few lines it attempts to express the inward relationship between poetry and life. Its brevity produces a certain detachment of voice, but the conception ends so quickly that it offers relatively little opportunity for renewed interpretation. The instance makes clear that concision is not automatically synonymous with density.

12. Poetic Language: Maithili Character, Directness, and Uneven Expression

A major strength of Shiv Kumar Prasad is language that stays close to the pronunciations and usage of the Maithili-speaking people. Words such as 'chai', 'achi', 'ahāṃ', 'hamar', 'apan', 'ḍīh', 'sineh', 'bhinsar', and 'dulār' preserve the language of readers' experience within poetry. Amid the contact of Maithili with Hindi and Sanskrit, these colloquially grounded words create an independent identity for the poetic voice. This is an important achievement in sustaining vitality even while discussing social matters.

In many places Prasad's language relies upon clarity of statement more than allusive metaphor. Such a style communicates its subject swiftly; ordinary households and living social conduct remain close to the reader. Yet the force of poetic language is not simply a matter of accessibility: a sentence that discloses its entire intention on first encounter sometimes offers little fresh experience in rereading. In the list of emotional terms in 'Jinigīk Sāṃs', certain 'Śīrṣak' poems, and the short composition 'Kavitā', the direct arrangement of ideas reduces the field of unspoken implication.

The language is most successful where folk expression, images of objects, village vocabulary, and inward wounds meet. The darkness and light of 'Manak Hāṭ', the remembered dwelling-place of 'Apan Ḍīh', the household courtyard of 'Toṛi Le Sineh', and the social satire of 'Nāk' are important examples. Here language derives its effect not from rigid standardisation but from living usage. To dismiss linguistic variants as mere 'errors' and correct them away could therefore injure the original poetic voice.

13. Aesthetic Experience: Compassion, Hope, Irony, and the Limits of Suggestion

In the general vocabulary of Indian poetics, several passages move among experiences associated with karuṇa (pathos), śṛṅgāra (love), humour, and tranquillity. The social pain in 'Maratai Garībahe' exemplifies compassion, the glance in 'Kājar' the erotic, the sharp figure in 'Nāk' satire, and the temporal sensitivity of 'Bitait Bhinsar' a mingling of decline and hope. But to place each poem mechanically in a separate box of rasa would diminish its linguistic and rhetorical conduct. Here rasa is an interpretive indication of poetic experience, not an all-solving yardstick.

Dhvani, or suggestion, becomes powerful when possibilities beyond a word's direct meaning arise. The 'darkness' and 'light' in 'Manak Hāṭ' work in this way; the locality of 'Apan Ḍīh' becomes a terrain of memory; the 'nose' in 'Nāk' speaks of social conduct governing honour rather than of an anatomical part alone. Conversely, wherever the poem explains its moral proposition too fully, suggestion remains limited. It is more useful to understand this unevenness as a tension between the conditions of poetry and the communication of subject matter.

Close reading shows that Prasad's affirmative ethical conclusions often seek an exhortative direction—'live', 'move forward'. Yet the most memorable moments are those in which ethical concern returns as a question. In this sense 'Manak Hāṭ' establishes the collection's own criterion of aesthetic criticism: the necessity of light is demonstrated not by command but by raising a question in the darkness.

14. The Public Context of Modern Maithili Literature

The collection should be placed within the definite context of Maithili print culture rather than used as a pretext for sweeping literary-historical claims.

Sneha Jha's research on colonial language policy shows that classifications of Maithili and official perceptions of it were involved in the history of linguistic rights. Lalit Kumar's work on print discusses complex relations among Maithili scripts, caste-based legitimacy, and the culture of publication. These studies do not alter the collection's primary subjects, but they provide a background for explaining why regional poetry assumes social significance even through choices of language and modes of publication.

Christopher Diamond examines the relationship between regional-language autonomy and the cultural dominance of Hindi and Bengali in the context of modern Maithili theatre. Ufaque Paiker establishes the importance of Maithili's multilingual and multi-community historical traditions. In their light, Prasad's Maithili voice should not be confined to the category of 'rustic flavour'. At the same time, these scholars' historical analyses cannot establish facts about Prasad's personal biography, caste self-identification, or the immediate motivations of his poems.

Prasad's poetic world may be situated within the wider current of modern literary uses of the Maithili vernacular. The distinctive feature of Manak Hāṭ is that ordinary situations—the breath of life, familial affection, the memory of the village, the poor person's existence, and social reputation—become central poetic problems. His other published works indicate a larger creative presence; the independent identity of this collection, however, lies in the continuous movement between moods of the mind and the experience of common life.

15. Critical Evaluation: Achievements and Incompleteness

15.1. Why the Collection Matters

First, it breaks beyond the narrow domain of private grief to construct a social psychology, with a perceptible arc of feeling from 'Manukh' to 'Maratai Garībahe'. Second, the poet renders experience tangible through the village, house, ancestral land, affection, morning, moon, flowers, food, markets, and everyday objects. Third, poems such as 'Manak Hāṭ' and 'Anuttarit Praśna' involve the reader in active ethical dialogue. Fourth, the pandemic poems record a specific historical crisis in the language of the people. Fifth, many words and syntactic patterns testify to the strength of colloquial usage in modern Maithili verse.

15.2. Why Re-evaluation Is Necessary

First, excessive recurrence of similar moral conclusions and familiar symbols sometimes makes the poems less distinguishable from one another. Second, while question-driven poems produce dramatic effects, the meaning of many overtly didactic lines is exhausted comparatively quickly. Third, an unforced rhythm arising from folk speech is effective, but control of suggestion and arrangement of lines are not equally dense throughout. Fourth, placing several pieces under the same generic title weakens recognition of their distinctive

poetic experiences. Acknowledging these limitations does not belittle the writer's sensibility; rather, it clarifies the collection's genuine aesthetic achievement.

15.3. The Discernment Required in Assigning Value

The merits and deficiencies of poetry cannot be measured by social usefulness alone. A voice raised for the poor is important, but it becomes poetry when word order, imagery, pause, question, silence, or inward rhythm gives experience a particular form. Likewise, simple words of love produce intimacy with the reader, but poetic value grows with the making of inward tension, unspoken meaning, and particular scenes. A just evaluation of Manak Hāṭ is possible only through this double criterion: a critical examination of both social sensibility and poetic construction.

16. Conclusion

Manak Hāṭ is a collection in which the solitary world of the mind becomes a public marketplace of experience. The gentleness of love, the breaking of relationships, village memories, the suffering of the poor, political irony, pandemic fear, and the desire to sustain life coexist within it. The dialogue between darkness and light in the title poem provides an effective thread of meaning for the entire book. Set beside the compassion of 'Maratai Garībahe', the sense of place in 'Apan Ḍīh', familial tensions in 'Toṛi Le Sineh', and satire in 'Nāk', it reveals the extent of the poet's sensibility.

Nevertheless, this is not a volume of uniformly achieved artistry. Many poems are easy to read and ethically valuable, but repetition and unevenness remain in the originality of imagery, subtle suggestion, editorial titling, and verbal restraint. Unqualified praise would therefore lead to a poorer, not fuller, understanding. The appropriate conclusion is that Prasad's strongest poems transform private affliction into a social question, whereas less successful poems turn a question immediately into an aphorism.

The significance of this collection in contemporary Maithili poetry should be sought in its lively spoken idiom, sympathy for ordinary people, and ability to transform personal suffering into a public question. Not every poem is equally unforgettable, but where image, question, folk word, and experience merge, Prasad's writing acquires a distinctive voice. Manak Hāṭ is ultimately poetry of the social world situated within the mind—a world in which the fractures of life and hope, despite their opposition, lend one another meaning.

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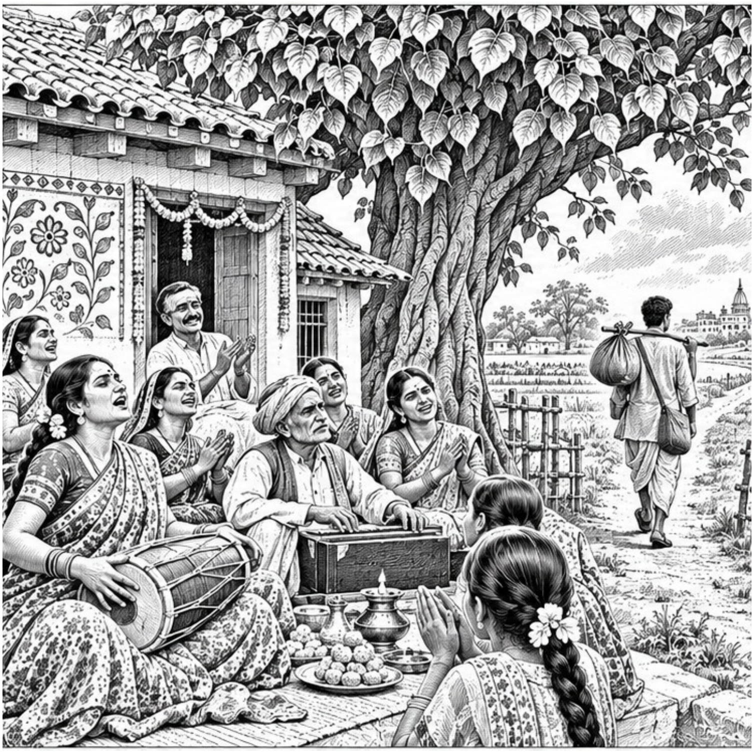
Soṃhāt–Ansoṃhāt: The Poetic World of Life



An Extended Text-Centred Literary Appraisal of Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad's Soṃhāt–Ansoṃhāt

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Abstract

Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad's Maithili poetry collection Soṃhāt–Ansoṃhāt brings together diverse voices of inward dialogue, rural memory, linguistic identity, social irony, labour, family feeling, and the experience of nature. The question arising from the title's dialectical structure develops through distinct poetic situations in 'Mithilā Dhām', 'Śahar O Gel', 'Gām Chūṭal', 'Nirmalīk Nirmalatāme', 'Bhātak Thārī', 'Khetihar', 'Ansoṃhāt', 'Tamaso Mā Jyotirgamaya', and the 'Sākhī' sequence. Village and city, memory and the present, belonging and self-criticism, collective attachment and ethical resistance form its principal axes of feeling. Lyrical repetition, rhythms close to folk song, spoken Maithili, and images drawn from everyday life are distinctive resources of expression. Yet certain poems also idealise rural life, turn ideas into explicit instruction, or arrest the extension of feeling through repetition. In the light of theories of suggestion, the poetic function of language, and critical

accounts of country and city, the collection's strength lies in its intimate communal voice and the tensions of dissent emerging within that voice.

Keywords: Maithili poetry; Shiv Kumar Prasad; Soṃhāt–Ansoṃhāt; rural memory; linguistic identity; folk rhythm; ethics; close reading.

1. Introduction: The Poetic World of Soṃhāt–Ansoṃhāt

Soṃhāt–Ansoṃhāt is a Maithili poetry collection by Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad, first published in 2018 by Pallavi Prakashan of Nirmali, Supaul. It opens with 'Prākkathan' ('Preface') and ends with the moral utterances of the 'Sākhī' sequence. Between these poles unfolds a many-coloured poetic world of Mithila's villages, soil, education, seasons, folk festivals, family ties, urban experience, labour, belief, and irony. The writer does not treat his surroundings as passive scenery: he seeks human values within places and relationships and confronts their contradictions. Even a name such as 'Nirmali' ceases to be a mere geographical address and acquires resonances of affection and social expectation.

The title does not immediately offer a single feeling. The near-compound of soṃhāt and ansoṃhāt opens an unstable region between appropriate and inappropriate, one's own and not one's own, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, acceptance and rejection. Some poems express a profound love of society; others criticise its conventions, disorder, pretence, and self-forgetfulness. To reduce the title to a pair of emotions, happiness and sorrow, would diminish its intellectual tension. In the poem 'Ansoṃhāt' in particular, the coexistence of self-respect, ostentation, material consumption, and neglect of generations gives this opposition a concentrated ethical sense.

The collection is poetically distinctive in allowing memories of place, while private, to connect with community, and in permitting social resistance, even when phrased didactically, to assume at moments the form of sharp imagery. The question is not simply how deeply the poet loves Mithila, but how, within that love, he struggles with his society's pretension, inequality, and self-oblivion. The effortless movement of vernacular speech and the songlike structure of repetition determine the felt form of that struggle.

2. Dedication, the Speaking Self, and the Formation of a Poetic Vision

The dedication gives concentrated expression to the experience of a younger generation, deprivation in the village, and distance from one's own place. The author's 'Pothīk Māde' ('About the Book'), with its discussion of the poems' diversity and their relation to the heart's experiences, further clarifies this intimate introduction. Both opening statements prepare the emotional ground for the village, home, linguistic intimacy, and changing perceptions of time in the poems that follow. Read beside the separation of 'Gām Chūṭal', the dedication raises an anxiety over the transmission of cultural experience from one generation to another.

Prasad's poems move between direct statement and suggestive indication. Repeated assertions of belonging in 'Mithilā Dhām' create a lyrical ground; the

stone-image of 'Śahar O Gel' gives urban insensibility material form; the light and darkness of 'Dīp' shape life's ethical uncertainty. Meaning is accordingly made not only in declared subjects but in the inner relations of sound, address, repetition, and image. Ānandavardhana's account of suggestion and Roman Jakobson's conception of poetic language provide useful perspectives on those subtleties, while Raymond Williams's reflections on country and city reveal the distance between an idealised remembered landscape and social reality.

The 'I' of this poetic world is not a single unvarying voice. At times it is an intimate individual, at others a representative of the collective village, an anxious speaker of love, or a consciousness questioning social abuses. These shifts prevent lyricism from becoming an uninterrupted repetition of one emotion; they make it a movement between personal experience and the people's life. Keeping the distinction between the poet as a person and the poem's 'I' in view makes the critical potential of the work clearer.

3. The Antithesis in the Title: Belonging, Discomfort, and Conflicting Values

The fundamental rhythm of Soṃhāt–Ansoṃhāt is dialectical rather than simply binary: attachment to that which one also finds necessary to criticise. In the opening 'Prākkathan', life is conceived as the coexistence of thorns and flowers; alongside expectation and neglect, truth and falsehood, goodwill and aversion, there is an insistence upon accepting artistic beauty. From the outset, the paired images of thorn and flower unsettle one-sided delight. Contradictory experiences accompany one another within the poet's view of life.

'Ansoṃhāt' gives this initial seed a social ground. Its speaker raises questions of imitation, social shame, pretence, pride in knowledge of the past, and the ironies of the present. On the surface the lines resemble familiar moral maxims; within them is also a self-critical discontent with one's community. Yet this criticism does not supply an extended analysis of a specific social class or institution: the breadth of its indications and the brevity of its occasions leave the question open. Such openness cannot always be credited to the art of suggestion; sometimes it is a lack of elaboration.

In 'Sabh Jhūṭh-Phūsme Bājhal Chī', the speaker feels entangled in a web of linguistic and social conduct. 'Jhūṭh' shows the communal spread of falsehood layer by layer. Read together, the poems reveal dissent not merely against an 'outside' society: the 'we' too becomes an object of criticism. This inclusion of the self provides an important foundation for the poetry's ethical character.

4. Mithila: Land, Language, and Cultural Commitment

The recurrence of 'apan' ('our own') in 'Mithilā Dhām' is no accident. Around the shade of trees, the sacred place, village, house and courtyard, and folk music, it intensifies fidelity to one's land. Mithila is not an inert map but a composite of sound, custom, memory, and human relationships. Through the return of the poetic line, memory makes a lyrical home for itself. The word 'dhām' itself

transforms an ordinary region into a site of cultural reverence: this is the word's emotional effect.

'Nirmalīk Nirmalatāme' confers an ethical meaning upon a place name through phonetic resemblance between 'Nirmali' and 'purity'. In scenes involving a teacher, young children, a school, and village activities, education becomes a particular site of social mobility. Attachment to home is not solely the remembrance of inheritance: it also opens a possibility of viewing education as the communal formation of values. Yet the easy conjunction of 'Nirmali' and 'purity' also idealises the place. Critical enquiry must ask whether such an ideal inspires local initiative or can also make local inequalities invisible.

'Maithil', 'Gāmak Bāt', and 'Bābāk Gām' present different forms of linguistic-community memory, domestic habit, and generational experience. Mithilesh Kumar Jha's research on the Maithili movement demonstrates that modern Maithili identity was fashioned through linguistic and historical debate. These poems, however, are not manifestoes of a particular movement; they are lyrical expressions of private and communal belonging. Recent historiography cautions against treating language and culture as the exclusive property of one caste or religion. Against that background, their 'our own' usefully invites an inclusive question: who belongs within this 'our', and who remains indistinct?

5. Village and City: The Sweetness of Memory and the Pain of Displacement

'Śahar O Gel' offers one of the collection's sharpest figurative moments. Arrival in the city is linked to the expectation of becoming a 'human being', with a cutting irony in the characterisation of village life as that of 'forest people'. The arrogance of urban civilisation is exposed: if standards set by the city determine who counts as human, rural experience is automatically demeaned. The poem reverses this criterion; the repeated 'stone of the city' becomes an image of unfeeling social structure. Harsh reality is compressed into stone.

'Dekh Elaū Ham Paṭnā' gives the general metaphor of 'Śahar O Gel' a particular experience through a series of urban sights. Roads, rail and transport, crossroads, intellectual or practical discomfort make the city not simply attractive but a difficult arrangement. Social criticism arises through a swift accumulation of scenes. In 'Gām Chūṭal', the repeated 'once again the village was left behind' becomes the rhythm of memory: the abandonment of melody, bread, earth, milk, and affection is no longer merely geographical movement. Migration becomes a social deprivation of the senses.

In The Country and the City, Raymond Williams raises questions about the historical idealisation and ideological making of literary images of rural and urban life. From that perspective, 'Gām Chūṭal' must also be asked how fully it recognises the real inequalities of village life. The collection itself acknowledges, through 'Choṭkī-Baṛkī' and 'Jātik Chāur', that the village is not a domain of unlimited equality. Within the volume, one poem thus modifies another's rural dream. This intratextual tension takes the work beyond simple pastoral lament.

6. Labour, Deprivation, and the Ethical Significance of a Plate of Rice

In 'Bhātak Thārī', a plate is not merely an object used for eating, but the centre of an assessment of human labour relations and the values of shared life. A scene of food makes sensuously present the most basic questions of public existence: whose labour provides grain, and why does scarcity persist for some? 'Karmak Bāṭ' proclaims an ideal of labour, insisting upon continued activity rather than the prospect of attaining its fruits without action. Read together, food and work lend meaning to one another: the plate of rice is the visible outcome of labour.

'Khetihar' joins the agricultural labourer's waiting to rain, soil, fields, and rural life. The earth here is not a decorative background but the condition of work. In 'Agahan Pūṣ' and 'Jāṛ', seasons cease to be merely descriptions of weather; they become measures of human effort, bodily experience, and the rural calendar. Here the poet's attachment to nature acquires meaning through the social rhythm of labour.

These compositions express the dignity of labour primarily through everyday human sensibility. Waiting in the fields, the pressure of the seasons, and the importance of grain give the poems a concrete grounding in life. Such brief images point towards wider economic questions, but the poet's primary interest is not data or policy; it is the experience of the labouring person. They continue a poetic tradition in which soil and work acquire ethical value alongside beauty.

7. Seasons, Environment, and Sensuous Perception

Read together, 'Sājh', 'Basant', 'Phaguā', 'Phāgun', 'Gāchh', 'Harit Pulakit Prāṇ', and 'Gāe Ā Gaṅgā' disclose a diverse map of the collection's engagement with nature. In 'Phaguā', colour and season occasion communal celebration; in 'Gāchh', the tree's life raises questions of human dependence and belonging. The title 'Gāe Ā Gaṅgā' evokes connected images of cultural religion and village livelihood. Beyond its title, the poem itself softens the opposition between nature and the life of the people.

In 'Harit Pulakit Prāṇ', greenness expresses the aspiration to move from the external scene to the inward condition of the living spirit. In terms of traditional analyses of rasa and dhvani, green literally signifies vegetation, but can suggest renewal, peace, and the regeneration of feeling. That potential implication is an interpretation by the reader, not a fact about a classical theory professed by the poet. 'Gāchh' employs more direct language for the nearness of tree and human presence; the workings of suggestion thus differ among the nature poems.

This attachment to seasons, trees, fields, and green growth provides a gentle basis for environmental awareness. Rob Nixon's reflections on environmental violence remind us that the experience of nature requires attention to inequality and crisis alongside beauty. Nature enters Prasad's poems predominantly as belonging, agriculture, and renewed life. The effectiveness of this beauty-centred presentation is accompanied by a relative recession of the social dimensions of

environmental vulnerability. The distinction clarifies both a limitation and a particular poetic orientation.

8. Folk Custom, Festivals, and Collective Memory

In 'Chaṭhi Pabani', ritual generates the rhythms of a festival, its riverbank or ghāṭ, and the shared activities of a community. To treat a festival simply as a religious observance would leave the poem incomplete: the work of women and men, the family, the season, the riverbank, and memories held in common speech may all belong to it. 'Ḍholak Borvār' brings rhythmic awareness into contact with village social relations; in 'Phaguā', collectivity meets seasonal delight.

Tradition has a double function in this local world. It transmits cultural feeling between generations but can also legitimise rigid restrictions imposed by custom. 'Paramparā' brings this question forward: tradition can sustain life when it remains a resource of supportive memory and narrow it when it becomes the sole instrument of judgement. The co-presence of inherited practice and social change is important to the collection.

'Sākhī–1', 'Sākhī–2', and 'Sākhī–3' are placed at the end. Their position is not a neutral structural detail: the passage from extended lyric lines to concise moral pronouncements intensifies the writer's voice of social instruction. The word sākhī itself recalls traditional aphorism and popular ethical counsel. Its direct genealogical descent from a particular historical tradition cannot be demonstrated here, but the formal resemblance is evident.

9. Self, Affection, Family, and Generational Address

An intimate, familial voice is indispensable to the collection's social concerns. 'Māy Hamar Nav-Kusum Nahelī' joins the maternal image to a new blossom, creating the tenderness of recollection. In very few lines 'Neh' makes love tangible through the body, village, and companionship. 'Piyās', 'Sumītā', 'Surabhit Ānan', and 'Manak Bāt' give emotional experience a private register. Even amid an investment in collective questions, the poems do not forget fragile moments of affection.

'Bauāk Ubaṭan' shows friction between domestic rites and social change; 'Choṭkī-Baṛkī' questions distinctions of greater and lesser status within or around the home. Read together, they make domestic life both a refuge of love and a place of social division. Concerning women's representation, the textual conclusion one can securely draw is that maternity, household relations, and forms of address offer powerful emotional resources in certain poems. It would nonetheless be unjustified to treat the entire volume, on that ground, as an extensive alternative narrative of women's experience.

'Kinko Kyo Nahi Bhel' raises the question of mutual distrust and indifference among people. In 'Bisabās', trust expands from an individual condition into a foundation of society. 'Neh' and 'Bisabās' become words of value despite their

brevity; their poetic impact grows stronger when they appear not as conventional sayings but as particular scenes of experience.

10. Suffering, Crisis, and the Experience of Mortality

'Bhūmkamp' reveals the fragility of human life through the instability of the earth. Shelter, fear, loved ones, and the future become urgent questions in the instant of an earthquake. Fear ceases to be simply an external catastrophe and becomes an experience of inner uncertainty. The transformation of a natural event into feeling exposes the gap between civilisation's confidence and actual human vulnerability.

'Jinigīk Jhamelā', 'Man Pachatāy', 'Thakāvaṭ', 'Avasthā', and 'Nor' register different degrees of personal unrest. In some passages failure becomes self-reproach; elsewhere it awakens a search for the meaning of shared life. 'Santoṣ' supplies one possible ethical response. In these poems, the will to live and despair occupy one another's presence rather than distinct camps.

The titles 'Harṣit Pulakit Prāṇ' and 'Āś Vihīn Hās Vihīn' evoke almost opposite emotional regions. Their comparison reveals the amplitude of the collection's emotional world. But variety of feeling alone does not establish depth. The aesthetic test is whether inward disposition becomes a concrete image, action, or situation. The finest moments of the collection achieve precisely this transformation.

11. Imagery: Stone, Lamp, Tree, Plate, and Path

The poet draws his stock of images primarily from ordinary life. Stone signifies urban insensibility; the tree an intimate environment; the plate sustenance; the path both action and movement; the lamp the possibility of an illuminated future. Two independent poems are entitled 'Dīp'. The recurrence of this title reveals the poet's special investment in the symbol of light, but their different emotional grounds prevent them from being merely mechanical reiterations of the same experience.

In the first 'Dīp', the survival of darkness despite the lamp burning through the night suggests that external arrangements of illumination and the inward human condition are not identical. The persistence of darkness in house or mind, even with sufficient lamplight, creates an intellectual suggestion. The second 'Dīp' is relatively concise, opening implications of inward radiance and the act of understanding. In 'Tamaso Mā Jyotirgamaya', the image of light converses with a Sanskrit maxim. Read together, the three poems make illumination a recurring metaphor for value, awareness, and communal reform.

The repetition of 'Corbā Sabhkichu La Gel' raises issues of trust, ease of mind, and social safety alongside the theft of objects. 'Vivāhak Arthī' places the culturally opposite images of celebration and funeral procession within its title. Pairing the usually auspicious occasion of marriage with an 'arthī' shocks the reader. Wounded relationships and social irony arise together from this

contradiction. Such collisions of symbols disclose a poetic strength that generates more than one meaning, unlike straightforward moral pronouncement.

12. Language and Folk Rhythm: The Art and Limits of Repetition

The collection's poetic language is chiefly Maithili close to conversation. Words such as 'apan', 'hamar', 'gām', 'man', 'neh', 'āb', and 'jinagī' keep the writing near ordinary life. In 'Gām Chūṭal', 'Mithilā Dhām', 'Śahar O Gel', 'Karmak Bāṭ', and 'Phāgun', the return of refrain-like lines creates lyricism. Repeated utterance establishes emotional continuity for the reader, while the intervening enlargement of imagery alters the feeling.

For Jakobson, the form of the message itself becomes an object of attention in poetic language. On this view, phonetic resemblance in 'Nirmalīk Nirmalatāme', repetition in 'Jhūṭh', verbal inversion in 'Soṃhāt–Ansoṃhāt', and the repeated seasonal name in 'Phāgun' actively produce meaning. If repetition adds no new significance after each stanza, however, it can create emotional stasis rather than a robust song structure. This is an important technical criterion for assessing the collection.

A free arrangement of lines, folk-song rhythms, refrains, and brief near-couplet statements frequently coexist. The purposes of the concise 'Sākhī' poems, for instance, differ from those of the extended songs. Poetic value is not merely a matter of the correct grammar of metre: the necessity of feeling, verbal restraint, and tensions within the line are also essential. The stone-image of 'Śahar O Gel', the alluring return of 'Gām Chūṭal', and the contradiction within 'Dīp' are effective examples of such coordination.

13. The Ethical Voice, Resistance, and the Question of Didacticism

'Karmak Bāṭ', 'Santoṣ', 'Tamaso Mā Jyotirgamaya', 'Jhūṭh', 'Ansoṃhāt', and the 'Sākhī' sequence make the poet's public ethical voice unmistakable. It insists that language should not merely serve private happiness or pain, but become an instrument of society's examination of itself. The frequent directness of statement brings readers into contact with uncomfortable public questions.

Ethical proclamation and poetry's polysemous experience are not, however, one thing. Where a line is satisfied with an injunction such as 'speak the truth' or 'work', the reader's freedom to imagine and reflect may shrink. Where the same commitment takes form in a particular plate, stone, tree, or lamp, the conclusion appears to grow from experience. The distinction between stated and suggested meaning in Indian poetics is useful here: the finest poetic moment occurs when words say something and evoke an experience exceeding that direct statement.

'Jātik Chāur' brings the painful experience of caste division within society into view. Read alongside 'Choṭkī-Baṛkī' and 'Paramparā', it shows the co-presence of belonging and discrimination in communal life. These poems question the

idealisation of society from within. They also show the difference between a desire for equality expressed directly as an idea and that desire transformed into tension within a scene of life.

14. The Strength and Critical Limits of the Communal "We"

The frequent 'we' and 'our own' convert private self-communion into collective feeling. Phrases such as 'our Mithila', 'our village', 'my mind', and 'my work' create linguistic nearness and participation. Yet the communal pronoun raises its own critical question: where do differences of caste, class, and life experience fall within the perimeter of 'our'? Mithilesh Kumar Jha's study of the Maithili movement and Lalit Kumar's research on caste and script illuminate the historical complexity of the issue. Prasad's poems do not systematically narrate that history, but the coexistence of belonging and separation raises the question within the poetry itself.

The attachment of 'Mithilā Dhām' and the educational hope of 'Nirmalīk Nirmalatāme' offer poetic suggestions of social cohesion. Conversely, 'Jhūṭh', 'Ansoṃhāt', and 'Choṭkī-Baṛkī' introduce hypocrisy and differentiation into the verse. Together they raise a question from within the 'we'. This is among the most productive critical possibilities of the collection.

15. The Closing "Sākhī": From Song to Aphorism

The lines of 'Sākhī–1' contain statements of value concerning teachers, learning, society, love, duty, sin, and merit. 'Sākhī–2' comments briefly on elders and juniors, social conduct, love, and labour; 'Sākhī–3' offers sayings on life's uncertainty and the discernment required in action. Placing the trio at the end changes the intellectual flavour of the whole collection: readers pass from private representation to public moral instruction.

The simplicity of their subjects enhances the sākhī poems' communicability but may diminish occasions for poetic surprise. An explicit moral injunction can be immediately memorable; an unexpected image may remain a question for much longer. On that criterion, the songlike poems and aphoristic pieces offer different aesthetic procedures. There is no need to impose a simplified ranking of 'higher' and 'lower' upon them: differing purposes require differing methods of evaluation.

16. A Consolidated Assessment of Achievements

The first achievement is the transformation of Mithila's geography into a language of lived experience. Village, town, field, tree, plate, festival, teacher, family, and song together constitute a shared poetic territory. The second is the immediacy of ordinary speech: familiar words acquire depth when placed in a significant context. The third is the coexistence of affection and self-criticism: the collection loves its world but does not remain silent about its wrongs. The fourth is readable or singable rhythm created through recurrence. The fifth is an

ability to shape questions through concrete images of lamp, stone, tree, path, and plate.

The incompletenesses are equally visible. In some poems an emotional idea is disclosed in one or two lines and restated again and again without a new image or perspective. Elsewhere the object of social dissatisfaction is insufficiently concrete, leaving the causal relationship between 'the decline of society' and 'the restoration of values' obscure. The dominant voice is ethical and emotional; interactions of class interests, caste experience, women's specific labour, and modern economic structures are not fully developed. To acknowledge these limits is not to impose an alien programme upon the poetry, but to examine the relation between the freedom of the reader and the scale of the poetry's social claims.

The social dimension of poetry must not be measured by the number of its declarations alone. A single stone-like image in 'Śahar O Gel' can pose a sharper question than an extended passage of moral instruction. The persistence of darkness despite outward light in 'Dīp' creates intellectual complexity. The refrain in 'Gām Chūṭal' becomes an emotional inscription of displacement. Here the poem goes beyond the 'thing said' in its message; such moments make the collection important as literature.

17. Conclusion

The central energy of Soṃhāt–Ansoṃhāt lies in an attempt to love one's community while naming the discomforts within it. Beyond personal likes and dislikes, its title suggests tensions among time, memory, town, village, language, labour, and ethics. On one side, 'Mithilā Dhām', 'Gāmak Bāt', 'Phaguā', and 'Gāchh' express a desire for recovery; on the other, 'Śahar O Gel', 'Gām Chūṭal', 'Jhūṭh', 'Ansoṃhāt', and 'Choṭkī-Baṛkī' express fracture, contradiction, and criticism. The lamp-image between these worlds signifies not a stable point of hope but a reminder of the continuing necessity of striving towards it.

A just assessment of the collection cannot emerge from inflated praise or a wholly negative survey. It is neither a complete rural history nor a comprehensive theory of modern social crises; it is a Maithili poetic practice in which ordinary language seeks its wider meanings in life. Where words become images, its poetic force grows concentrated; where ideas become immediate sermons, their density diminishes. The coexistence of these two tendencies defines the book's distinctive critical character.

Future comparison of this book with Prasad's other volumes, listening-based study of poems close to folk melodies, and investigation of regional readers' reception may open new dimensions of Maithili lyricism. Nevertheless, the independent literary identity of Soṃhāt–Ansoṃhāt is already evident. It joins affection for the village to social discernment and makes the coexistence of attachment, irony, questioning, and ethical resistance possible within direct Maithili speech.

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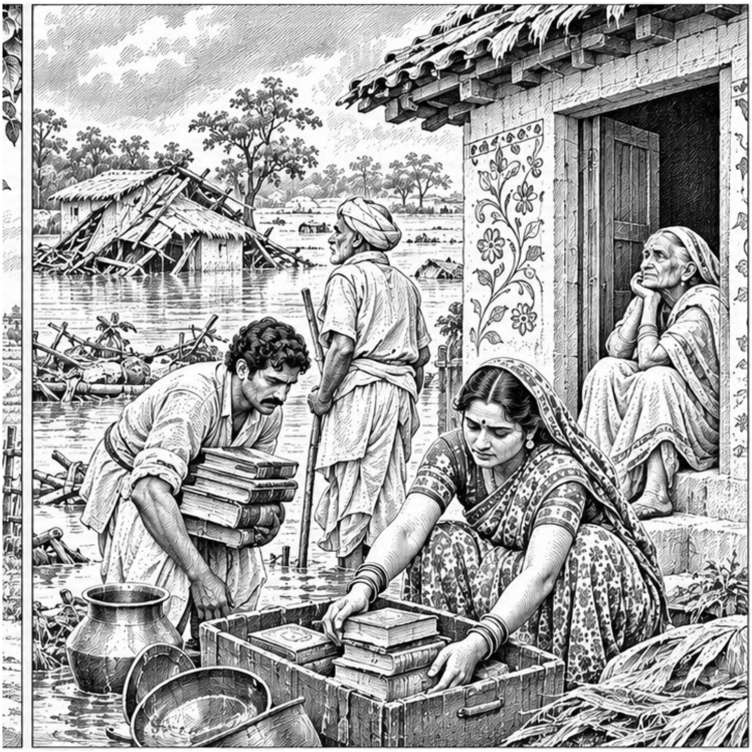
Rāga–Virāga: Folk Memory, Linguistic Identity, and Social Ethics



An Extended Critical Study of a Poetry Collection by Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad

Abstract

Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad's Rāga–Virāga creates an intense poetic dialogue between love and detachment, lived experience and self-examination, memories of Mithila and its changing social reality. Its eighty-two poems intertwine an intimate attachment to the Maithili language, affection for family and tradition, floods and environmental insecurity, the ironies of education, the material and cultural world of the village, and crises in public conduct. This study argues that rāga is not merely attachment but a constructive force in social relationships, whereas virāga takes the form of discernment directed against its blindness, selfishness, and hypocrisy. Close readings of 'Rāga–01', 'Rāga–02', 'Rāga–Virāga', 'Maithilī', 'Mithilā', the flood sequence, both parts of 'Hamrāme Hamar Gām', 'Navkā Śikṣā', 'Beṭī', 'Maṭrā Māy', 'Baṛhan', and 'Kavitā' disclose the characteristics of folk-oral rhythm, enumeration, address, satire, paired oppositions, and structured remembrance. The essay also marks the limited autonomy of women characters, idealisation of the past, broad moral

generalisation, and didactic endings of some poems. From this two-sided evaluation, Rāga–Virāga emerges as an important convergence of intimacy and social criticism in contemporary Maithili poetry.

Keywords: Maithili poetry; Rāga–Virāga; folk memory; linguistic identity; ecocriticism; floods; satire; women's experience; free verse.

1. Introduction: A World of Affection and an Awareness of Irony

Rāga–Virāga is a collection of Maithili poetry in which private affliction, social relationships, and collective responsibility cannot be separated from one another. Published by Pallavi Prakashan, Nirmali, in 2024, the plurality of its eighty-two poems creates not only a variety of subjects but multiple perspectives upon experience. From the devotion of 'Gaṇapati' to the answering voice of 'Kahū Ham Jhūṭh Kahai Chī?', the poet appears by turns as a modest worshipper, a bearer of rural memory, a family member, and a severe observer of public life. Amid these changing roles, one demand remains constant: human conduct should be tested against human suffering and dignity.

The dedication relates the suffering of 'Mother Maithili' to geographical and linguistic conflict within Mithila, factionalism, domination, and private interest. The collection's intimacy is therefore not free of conflict at the outset: an awareness of injury enters affection itself. In his preface the poet identifies life's happiness and sorrow, natural disasters, administrative conduct, and social deformities as impulses for his writing. His insistence on poetry as 'a criticism of life' discloses a foundational aesthetic principle: compassion and protest are not antagonists but two voices of the same ethical experience.

Four interrelated questions guide this enquiry. First, how does the intimacy of rāga become the discernment of virāga? Second, how does support for the Maithili language and nostalgia for Mithila's villages confront the problems of inclusion and exclusion within society? Third, how do poems about calamity, education, migration, and domestic relations transform private suffering into public questions? Fourth, to what degree do free verse, folk-oral rhythm, repetition, enumeration, and satire effectively transform themes into poetry? Answers require the detailed examination of individual poetic situations.

2. Critical Frameworks: Suggestion, Environment, and Rural Memory

In the production of meaning in Rāga–Virāga, explicit statement works alongside implications conveyed by imagery, contradiction, address, and silence. To treat its satire as an inventory of accusations or its recollections as merely a love of the past would obscure its artistry. The afflicted body and the administration's composure in the flood sequence, the silence of departure in 'Baṛhan', and the simultaneous compassion and pleasure in another's suffering in 'Rāga–01' open further levels of meaning. Criticism must recognise such multiplicity while also marking the limits of poems that abruptly stop at a single conclusion.

Ānandavardhana's account of dhvani offers a way to distinguish stated from suggested meaning; this study does not seek to impose ancient poetic classifications upon modern Maithili verse. Lawrence Buell's environmental criticism helps raise questions of human dependence upon nature and destructive intervention in 'Mithilā', 'Janambhūmi', and the flood poems. Raymond Williams's reflections on country and city provide comparative ground for examining rural memory and the struggle of migration. In histories of Maithili literature, the work of Jayakanta Mishra and Devakanta Jha situates modern writing within a wider tradition; the meaning and evaluation of Prasad's poems must nevertheless be determined by the poems themselves.

3. The Arrangement of Poems: Five Interwoven Fields of Feeling

The collection opens with devotional compositions but does not remain exclusively ritualistic. 'Maithilī', 'Mithilā', and 'Janambhūmi' raise questions of linguistic and geographical attachment; the four flood poems confront natural and institutional crises; 'Śikṣāk Sansār' and 'Navkā Śikṣā' expose ironies of public education; 'Beṭī', 'Maṭrā Māy', 'Māe', and 'Baṛhan' shape the warmth and distances of domestic life. The ordering does not confine these themes to separate compartments. Questions from one current of poetry return within another, creating the collection's internal unity.

4. The Many Meanings of Rāga: Love, Disposition, and Self-Restraint

In 'Rāga–01', a word that begins with music soon extends to language, soil, inherited customs, tenderness, courtyard, and threshold. The line 'Without affection, the earth does not become one family' conceives attachment as a constructive force in relationships. But the poem makes a startling turn: the propensity to 'laugh at another's suffering' can also fall under rāga. This reversal denies attachment automatic ethical purity. What one is attached to must itself be judged. The poem's real seriousness lies in this self-examination.

'Rāga–Virāga' develops the question of restraint within the earlier poem's emotional range. Pairs such as 'from attachment to detachment', 'from desire to desirelessness', and 'from clinging to non-attachment' establish a progression of spiritual discipline. The poet admits that this path is easy to speak about and difficult to embody. The many names of Krishna culminate in a religious affirmation of unity. Detachment becomes not the absence of feeling but an aspiration towards ethical mastery over it. Although this spiritual answer cannot fully address the complexities of broad social conflict, it cannot be detached from the collection's inward philosophy.

'Rāga–02' moves these reflections on intimacy into the public sphere of the mother tongue. Language is 'the carrier of feeling', 'not the ancestral property of a lineage': in this assertion the poet criticises ownership of language based upon birth, caste, and descent. References to Assam, Janakpur, and Madhupur suggest the expansive geography of the Maithili-speaking world. The material nearness of mango, latām, makhān, and betel prevents love of language from remaining

a declaration; it joins language to the body, taste, land, and relationship. The universal humanity of the first rāga becomes an insistence on linguistic inclusion.

'Manak Hāṭ' and 'Manak Akās' offer two figures of inward life. In the former the marketplace is where happiness and sorrow, old and new, and recollections encounter one another; in the latter, the breadth of the sky includes rainbows, clouds of adversity, and the movement of failing hopes. The mind both gathers objects and opens onto possibility. The reversal between 'life's dream' and 'the life of a dream' in 'Sapnā' gives these distinctions an intellectual extension: imagined life and active aspiration in life are not identical. In these poems philosophical meaning appears through imagery and shifts in word order rather than through exhortation.

5. Maithili and Mithila: From Love of the Mother Tongue to Public Identity

In 'Maithilī', the poet presents his literary labour not as a bid for personal prestige but as a linguistic obligation. 'I am a son of Maithili / my mother is Maithili' makes the mother tongue a relationship of nurture and acknowledged debt. The final question—'Whose rights do I take away / by writing and reading in Maithili?'—both dignifies linguistic labour and reveals a wounded consciousness of distrust and competition within the literary community. This voice possesses the energy of personal rejoinder, although institutional inequalities in language resources, instruction, and publishing may also form the wider setting of such conflict.

In 'Apan Maithilī', long journeys, contact with several languages, and the absence of one's native speech construct a mobile self-understanding. Recalling Assam, Bengal, Punjab, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala, and Karnataka, the poet still remembers the 'sweet Maithili tongue'. There is a subtle tension between this poem and 'Rāga–02': the unique intimacy of one's own speech in one, the rejection of lineage-based ownership in the other. Held together, they yield an inclusive form of love for the mother tongue, in which a multilingual life does not diminish attachment to one's language.

In 'Mithilā', a peepal tree becomes the centre of an entire social aspiration. Its shade welcomes not only Maithil relatives but 'all humanity', animals, and birds. The tree thus embodies ecological coexistence as well as political inclusion. The contrasting image appears in 'Janambhūmi', where the absence of trees and water, heaps of plastic, crumbling reciprocity, and the dominance of money signify communal deterioration. One poem creates an ideal, the other interrogates present disintegration. Together they clarify the collection's emotional centre.

The dedication's references to linguistic dispute and social dissension find a positive answer in 'Rāga–02', with its rejection of hereditary rights, and in the shared shade of 'Mithilā'. At moments, however, the poems tend to explain public problems solely in terms of individual moral failings. Their literary

validity lies in transforming the poet's anxiety into wider ethical questions, not in offering automatically proven charges against particular people or institutions.

6. Four Voices of the Flood: Calamity, Public Ethics, and Environmental Justice

'Bāṛhi–01' constructs its poetic space from mourning for a suddenly devastated home. Amid washed-away lives, the delay in finding the body of a father or another relation extends the time of catastrophe far beyond the moment of death. Fire, water, and time vie in forming an image of disaster. Its final concern, however, is not only nature's terror but the continued weeping of the 'poor and powerless'. Here natural crisis becomes a human question about social inequality.

In 'Bāṛhi–02', uprooted homesteads, torn-down trees, hungry bodies, and people standing on the road collide with scenes of relief administration. Describing victims as playthings of 'human beings, nature, officials, and newspapers' criticises the public spectacle of disaster. Where is the independent voice of the hungry person among calamities seen, identified, and reported by others? The poem makes readers uncomfortable with that question. Compassion becomes an enquiry into institutional responsibility rather than private sorrow alone.

In 'Bāṛhi–03', the loss of fields, the rice-hearth, milk and curds, and household possessions embodies the collapse of domestic economy. Flooding is not simply the force of water but the simultaneous dispossession of food, work, shelter, and future. The names of domestic objects translate the scale of disaster into local particulars. This material specificity distinguishes the poem from an abstract lament about 'nature's fury'.

'Bāṛhi–04' turns the voice of compassion into dramatic satire. Waving politicians, officials offering explanations, collapsing embankments, and the refrain 'they will build it again and it will break again' uncover an institutional performance of sympathy. Questions like 'Yesterday they said everything was fine / what happened during the night?' set the truth of village experience against administrative claims. The poem's achievement is not merely a record of events; it makes the breakdown of public trust into poetic rhythm. The four poems together trace an ethical geography of disaster, moving from grief to satire.

'Apnā Lel' changes the direction of the critique. Cutting trees, filling ponds and wetlands, interfering arbitrarily with embankments, and later blaming the government are practices in which the poet recognises society's own participation. In 'Gāy', neglect of an animal after profiting from the services of a companion to agricultural life questions humanity's utilitarian attitude. Neither nature nor animals remain inert resources for human convenience. Although the poems do not provide a complete scientific account of flood causation, they create an awareness of human environmental responsibility.

7. "Hamrāme Hamar Gām": The World of Remembered Things and the Pain of Migration

In 'Hamrāme Hamar Gām–1', the village is no empty name for a feeling: it is a specific world of grafted mango varieties, the directions of orchards, yellow and red fruits, a grandmother's garment, family forms of address, and childhood games. Repeatedly naming mango varieties is not merely an inventory of memory; it enlarges the perception of place. Taste, smell, and bodily recollection make the childhood village present before the reader. The object is thus a poetic device: without it the affection of the maternal village would remain general and indistinct.

In 'Hamrāme Hamar Gām–2', the village takes shape through ponds, wells, sacred grounds, temples, a potter's wheel, earthen vessels, jamun trees, and labour in makhān cultivation. The potter's home and the process of making objects prevent the village from becoming only an idyllic spectacle: it is a world of craft and production. Yet this association of memories does not automatically include extended analyses of every caste and economic relationship. Recollection presents one beloved image of the village, not the entirety of social history. That distinction is necessary to understand the poem.

'Apan Āṅgan' brings the bitter questions of migration and inheritance into this rural memory. A mansion built away from home, an abandoned courtyard, decaying walls, the waiting of an aged mother, and the dilemma of selling land turn relations between village and city into tensions of economic ethics and familial responsibility. 'Karī Kon Yog' treats the glare of the city and the experience of elders left behind in the village with the sharpness of folk speech. It would be mistaken here to assume that village society is necessarily innocent and the city necessarily corrupt: the centre is the imbalance growing within human relations.

The childhood depicted in 'Hamrāme Hamar Gām–1' offers scenes of affection and common play rather than bitter memories of caste and hierarchy. There is literary truth in this luminous recollection, but it cannot be made into an historical judgement that village society as a whole was harmonious. First-person recollection is a credible affective form of a particular experience, not a substitute for the experiences of every community. Marking this limit while respecting the poet's intimate world is an essential task of criticism.

8. The Ironies of Education: Certificates, Schools, and Public Promises

In 'Śikṣāk Sansār', anger at the educational system finds expression through incongruous animal comparisons and exaggeration. The poem exposes a serious rift among scholarships, formal attendance, speeches in the capital, and actual instruction. In 'Bāt Ta Bujhiyau', educated unemployed youth and brokerage surrounding public schemes expand this gap into a larger crisis of social life. The impact of such satire is not nullified by a lack of statistical evidence; its task is to awaken a moral experience of contradictions produced by institutions.

Nevertheless, exaggerated figures should not be taken as literal portraits of all teachers or students.

In 'Navkā Śikṣā–01', the 'MA' and 'BA' degrees mark the irony of a severed connection between study and livelihood. In 'Navkā Śikṣā–02', repeated questions—if studying is no longer necessary, what becomes of the relation among examinations, pupils, and education?—supply a rhythm of popular spoken protest. Mention of bicycles, uniforms, and other schemes does not constitute an ethical objection to those provisions; it expresses anxiety about their becoming substitutes for teaching. This distinction matters, otherwise the satire could take on a meaning opposed to the broadening of social opportunity.

The strength of this sequence is its poetic questioning of the distance between institutions and their professed aims. Yet the distinct responsibilities of teachers, students, guardians, administrators, and labour markets are at times condensed into one accusation. Such compression heightens the energy of satire while potentially obscuring structural complexity. The collection thus offers a poetic expression of moral dissatisfaction rather than a policy programme.

9. Daughter, Mother, and Sister: Love, Care, and Women's Place

In 'Beṭī', the daughter becomes the laughter of the courtyard, the adornment of the house, and a refuge of human belonging. By describing her existence as a blessing, the poem brings a tender affirmation into opposition with patriarchal devaluation. Yet the centre of this love remains for the most part the happiness and beauty of the family. The daughter's independent desire, education, decisions, and public life do not acquire distinct voices here. Recognising this difference does not negate the poem; it identifies the social limit of its affection.

'Maṭrā Māy' is a moving account of the abandoned labour of an ageing mother. The mother at the threshold, her stiffened body, sacrifices for her son's education and employment, and her solitude in the last stage of life make unpaid care labour the subject of poetry. The growing distance from the mother as the son prospers is the poet's ethical question. Yet to assign all causes of domestic change to the arrival of a daughter-in-law would diminish the complexity of women characters. The son's own decisions and the compulsions of migration belong to this moral relationship as well. Recognising this tension clarifies the poem's social significance.

'Māe' and 'Mā'' pursue different emotional directions of maternal love. The first constructs a language of remembrance and absence; the second finds protection in the images of a garment's end, clouds, and the shelter of a lap. In 'Baṛhan', the joy of brother and sister meeting after a long separation and the silence of parting create a profound effect out of language's incapacity. The poem ends with the wordless 'brother silent / sister silent'. Where many compositions in the collection explain their meanings fully, 'Baṛhan' makes silence a means of creating meaning.

'Joṛi Le Sineh Āi' raises the unstable question of a woman's right to a home within this domestic world. The home of birth, the marital home, and finally the son's home: what place remains that a woman can call her own? Read together, the poem calling the daughter light and the question of this permanent homelessness make the collection's perspective on women less than one-dimensional. There is affection but also inequality of rights, respect but frequently a structure of relationships in which a woman does not control the final decision.

10. Devotion and Hypocrisy: Two Faces of Popular Worship

'Gaṇapati', 'Caurcan', and 'Dukhaharṇī' convey the communal warmth of folk festivals and goddess worship. Aripan designs, courtyards, curds, seeing the moon, and prayer make religious experience a shared rhythm of domestic life. Yet 'Pūjā' satirises the lifelessness of devotion amid imposing marquees and displays, while 'Pūjāk Mahattā' marks the distance between religious noise and genuine worship. The poet does not equate devotion with religious commerce. Cultural practices of religion and a criticism of public hypocrisy coexist in the collection.

In 'He Hari Caraṇ Kamal Balihārī', the worlds of greed, usury, and falsehood enter a refrain of praise. Exposing irreligious conduct through the language of devotion makes this mock-hymn a potentially incisive satire. The ethical conclusion of these poems is that outwardly successful ritual does not guarantee compassion or truthfulness. Devotional feeling on one side and irony on the other constitute a religious transformation of the volume's rāga–virāga structure.

11. Poetic Language: Free Verse, Refrain, Enumeration, and Silence

Free verse is the principal formal basis of these poems, although their rhythm is not uniform. The repeated word 'rāga' in 'Rāga–01' gradually enlarges an idea; paired oppositions in 'Rāga–Virāga' provide intellectual concision; recurring questions in 'Navkā Śikṣā–02' and 'Kahū Ham Jhūṭh Kahai Chī?' become dramatic protest in public speech. Silence rather than a refrain is the primary meaning-making resource in 'Baṛhan'. These differing solutions suggest that the poet is not only listing ideas but seeking a different spoken movement for different circumstances.

Colloquial Maithili is an important artistic resource here. Words such as 'nenā-bhuṭkā', 'aṅganā-duār', 'ḍīh', 'pokhari', 'makhān', 'aripan', 'bhaujī', and 'kākī' establish the material setting of local relationships. Local colouring is not in itself a literary virtue: it acquires poetic value when active within an economy of scene, action, and memory. The names of mangoes and earthen utensils in 'Hamrāme Hamar Gām' are important because they restore vanishing local knowledge and maps of relationship. In 'Bāṛhi–03', the sequence of domestic goods makes the economic and cultural cost of destruction evident.

Address is another major way of making meaning. The prayer 'He Bhagavatī', the inward speech of 'Halo Jinigī', and the public question 'Kahū Ham Jhūṭh Kahai Chī?' draw readers into immediate dialogue. In 'Konā Chī?', ordinary conversation and contradictions of religious conduct meet on the same oral stage. This technique lessens distances among song, talk, reproach, satire, and prayer. Cleanth Brooks's emphasis on the internal tensions of poetry offers one comparative way of examining this universe of meaning, but the rhythms and social contexts of Maithili vernacular speech must remain the primary foundation of criticism.

'Dāt̃ Bīc Jībh San' is a noteworthy instance of the poet's self-irony about poetics. Naming rasa, ornament, metre, suggestion, oblique expression, story, and novel, he admits his limitations. Yet this self-deprecation also conceals a rebuke to literary pretension, aggressive pedantry, and competition for status. The poem works simultaneously as self-disclosure and communal satire. A declaration of modesty does not, however, exempt it from criticism of formal achievement; it must ultimately be assessed in its words, sounds, and structure.

12. Poetry and Life: The Work's Self-Awareness

In 'Kavitā', the poet states that poetry does not arise spontaneously from an indifferent sky or earth; it is born from the 'unbearable sensitivity of felt emotion'. The light and darkness of life, laughter, failure, and the will to live are present together. The poem echoes the collection's opening declaration of poetic purpose: poetry is not autonomous ornament but a sensory reconstruction of lived life. That claim does not mean a mere copy of direct experience. An object becomes a work when experience acquires new rhythm and meaning within words.

'Jinigī–01' expresses violent greed and exploitation in life with a severe voice; 'Jinigī–02' sees life through varied states of happiness, labour, poverty, bodily hardship, and arrogance. In 'Loke San Lok', the opposition 'the pleasure-seeker in attachment / the ascetic in detachment' articulates an awareness of different human propensities. The combined implication is that love of life need not compromise with injustice: it can become the basis for recognising it. Reality, feeling, and ethical response are three important elements of the collection's poetics.

13. Achievements, Contradictions, and Literary Value

The first achievement is to give emotional power to specific details of folk life. Distinct mango varieties, the potter's wheel, makhān, earthen water pots, submerged homesteads, a mother's threshold, and the parting of brother and sister give the human world depth of sight, touch, and recollection. The second is fearless treatment of questions of public ethics: education, political spectacle, natural calamity, linguistic exclusivism, and familial neglect are openly interrogated. The third is to make the rhythms of spoken Maithili into literary

form. Especially the irony of 'Bāṛhi–04', the recurrence of 'Rāga–01', and the silence of 'Baṛhan' demonstrate the force of different poetic devices.

The limits are equally clear. Ethical agitation sometimes gathers different social roles into one category of blame through sweeping indications such as 'everyone' or 'no one'. Rural remembrance often produces an ideal of an affectionate past in which caste and class inequalities may remain comparatively obscured. Final lines in some poems deliver the conclusion themselves rather than keeping interpretive possibilities open. Set beside the silence of 'Baṛhan' and the unanswered questions of 'Manak Akās', these endings reveal more clearly the difference between the subtlety of experience and the pressure to declare a message.

Mothers and daughters occupy respected positions in the depiction of women's experience, but their independent desires, the social value of their work, and their rights of decision do not emerge equally deeply everywhere. 'Joṛi Le Sineh Āi' challenges this limitation from within. The environmental poems raise important questions of ecological destruction and civic duty, but place comparatively greater emphasis on ethical conduct than on complex causal relations. This need not be an inherent defect of poetry; yet where a particular experience aspires to become a wider social truth, criticism must enquire into alternative readings and absent experiences.

14. Conclusion: The Ethical Test of Affection

The central tension of Rāga–Virāga is not a simple opposition of attachment and renunciation, but an ethical examination of affection. Attachment to language, village, earth, family, devotion, and humanity binds the poet to life; detachment from hypocrisy, selfishness, exploitation, and inequality gives that bond a critical perspective. The suffering caused by floods becomes a question directed at administrative spectacle; love of language becomes a rejection of 'hereditary property'; rural memory preserves in affecting form many vanishing traces of local knowledge. The collection's significance emerges particularly through these three movements: private experience assumes the language of communal responsibility.

The artistic success of the poems is not uniform. At points urgent ethical insistence restricts the freedom of imagery, but in the finest poems objects and feelings illuminate one another. The four flood poems move from grief to civic protest; the extended catalogues in 'Hamrāme Hamar Gām' disclose the cultural significance of remembered place; the silence of 'Baṛhan' shows the limits of words. Rāga–Virāga is therefore not simply an autobiographical outpouring within Maithili poetry. It offers a distinctive contribution to debates over the feelings of ordinary life, linguistic identity, environmental unease, and public ethics.

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Paghalait Himkhaṇḍ: Hindi–Maithili Poetry Translation and Women's Consciousness

An Extended Literary-Critical Study of Rajni Chhabra's Poetry and Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad's Maithili Translation

Abstract

Paghalait Himkhaṇḍ (2018), Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad's Maithili rendering of Rajni Chhabra's Hindi poetry collection, is distinguished by its exploration of felt experience and cultural re-creation. Its sixty-three poems interweave love, memory, relationships grown cold, trust, self-recognition, women's identity, family, education, and linguistic inheritance. This study focuses on the poetic process by which the emotional structures of Hindi poems acquire a new aural and visual existence through Maithili modes of address, syntactic rhythm, vernacular images, and ethical sensibility. Close readings of selected poems draw upon Roman Jakobson's interlingual translation, Eugene Nida's equivalence, Gideon Toury's target-culture orientation, Lawrence Venuti's domestication, André Lefevere's rewriting, and Sherry Simon's feminist approach to translation. Poems such as 'Nārī', 'Ekṭā Herāel Janānī', 'Rājbhāṣā', 'Vidyāk Bāṭ', 'Gharak Pāg', 'Himkhaṇḍ', and 'Ahāk Thātī' prevent the collection from remaining a poetry of private sensation alone: they open questions of social values, identity, and inheritance. A facing reading of the Hindi and Maithili versions of the title poem brings into focus the altered emotional charge of its images and the contribution of the palpable Maithili idiom. The book's foremost achievement lies in the intimate form of address and unaffected Maithili expression of human experience; in certain poems, aphoristic statement and the restricted development of imagery pose artistic challenges.

Keywords: Paghalait Himkhaṇḍ; Rajni Chhabra; Shiv Kumar Prasad; Hindi–Maithili translation; translation of poetry; target culture; women's identity; domestication; close reading.

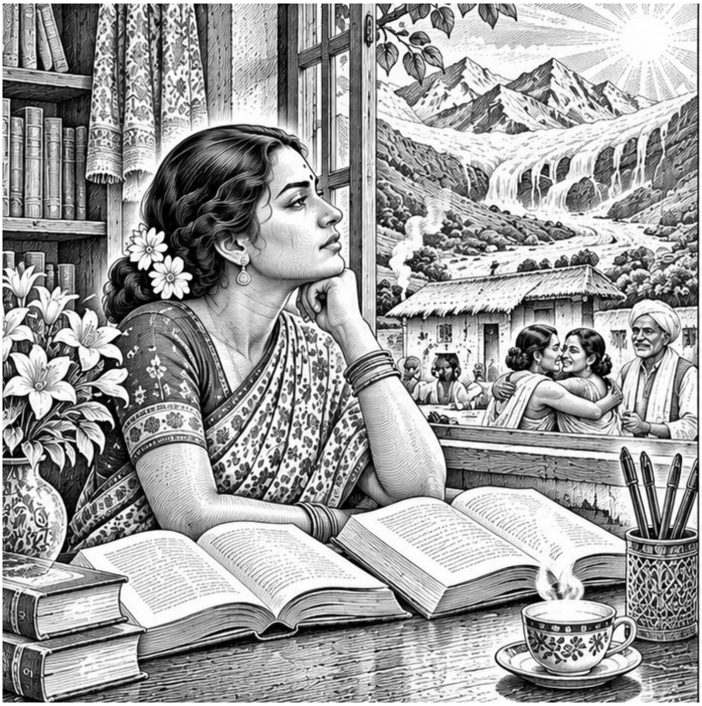
1. Introduction: Poetry within Translation and a New Language within Poetry

In the passage of poetry between languages, the meaning of a word does not remain immobile. Entering another language, an emotion acquires new conditions of voice, rhythm, address, recollection, and cultural identity. From Chhabra's Hindi poems to the Maithili Paghalait Himkhaṇḍ, this is also a journey of images: their coldness and warmth, distance and affection resonate anew within translated words. Fidelity to the intention of the original and the creative autonomy of Maithili are both important in evaluating the translation. Poetic equivalence is not merely a correspondence of words; it is a composite relation among meaning, sound, cultural disposition, and the reader's experience.

This Maithili version of Chhabra's Hindi poems, prepared by Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad, was published by Pallavi Prakashan, Nirmali, in 2018. Its sixty-three poems proceed from 'Madhuban' to 'Bisabāsak Mūrti'. Childhood, nature, and the mind's freedom occupy the opening movement; identity, women, home, language, and struggles for life appear in the middle; memory, inheritance, and the remaking of trust shape the conclusion. This thematic range gives the collection a distinctive emotional cadence. Rather than impose a mechanical plot upon the order of poems, it is more productive to examine their mutual references and recurrences.

The poet's 'Anusṛjan: Sāhityik aur Sāṃskṛtik Anuṣṭhān' and the translator's 'Āmukh ā Ābhār' are two important intellectual points of entry into the undertaking. Chhabra envisages in translation the possibility of cultural exchange; Prasad introduces the poems to Maithili readers with a sense of intimacy. These two prefatory voices do not substitute for formal analysis of the poems; they establish the background of their literary purposes.

A distinctive feature of the collection is that familiar speech from the home and wider questions of human life can meet within a single poem. Words such as 'ahā' (you, honorific), 'ham' (I/we), 'jinagī' (life), 'raud' (sunshine), and 'pāg' (the ceremonial Mithila headgear) draw a Maithili reader close; poems such as 'Nārī', 'Rājbhāṣā', and 'Vidyāk Bāṭ' extend that intimacy into the domain of social thought. Criticism must therefore consider together the ease of communicating meaning, poetic concentration, women's voice, and the subtle distinctions involved in cultural relocation.



Poetry between Hindi and Maithili: a thawing landscape of memory

2. The Poetic World: Themes, Sensibilities, and Perspectives

The sixty-three poems in Paghalait Himkhaṇḍ vary in scale, speaking position, and emotional disposition. The remembered natural world of 'Madhuban', the wish for freedom in 'Unmukta', the reconstruction of self in 'Paricay', the existential insistence of 'Nārī', the domestic invisibility of 'Ekṭā Herāel Janānī', the linguistic consciousness of 'Rājbhāṣā', the social aspiration of 'Vidyāk Bāṭ', the family's dignity in 'Gharak Pāg', the relational metaphor of 'Himkhaṇḍ', and the renewed hope of 'Bisabāsak Mūrti' together trace the collection's principal map of feeling. Some poems unfold their meanings through remarkably brief statements; others build their effects by extending a scene, a stretch of time, or a situation.

Most of the poems employ free verse. Lineation, repetition, address, direct questioning, personification, and the conversion of nature into a metaphor for mental states are important formal resources. It would thus be inadequate simply to classify the poems as writing in 'simple language'. Beneath their plainness, social discontent, fragmented recollection, and the moral imperative of hope are entangled. Particularly significant is the movement by which a statement arising from an individual experience repeatedly becomes a question about communal existence.

Contrary feelings inhabit the poems simultaneously: affection and distance, home and solitude, remembrance and forgetting, tradition and self-determination, trust and doubt. It is precisely these tensions that permit the creative enlargement of Chhabra's experience. In the Maithili version, they are often articulated through pronouns, ordinary diction, and visual images. Yet the inclination to turn difficult questions too quickly into maxims sometimes narrows the poems' multiplicity of meaning.

For poetry and translation in this shared literary terrain, the essential test is whether the utterance generates within itself the pressure of experience, an accord of sounds, and a new vision of feeling. The conflict of cold and sunlight in 'Himkhaṇḍ' is as materially apprehensible as the reality of unacknowledged labour in 'Ekṭā Herāel Janānī'. Conversely, when life's values appear as direct instruction without an inward transformation into form, a poem may offer an admirable idea without always acquiring commensurate artistic depth.

3. Translation Theory and the Creative Resources of Maithili Poetry

3.1 Interlingual Translation and the Translatability of Poetry

In Roman Jakobson's conception of 'interlingual translation', the signs of one language are interpreted through the sign-system of another. A poem's meaning, however, is not exhausted by dictionary equivalents: phonetic and structural relations generate further significations. 'Sneh', 'sineh', 'raud', 'uṣṇatā', 'himkhaṇḍ', and 'barafak pahāṛ' can inhabit related semantic fields while producing different affective landscapes. The question is not simply which is the 'correct' word for another, but what additional embodied presence a changed word gives to the reader's experience.

3.2 Nida: Formal Closeness versus Equivalence of Effect

Eugene Nida draws an important distinction between formal proximity and a comparable effect upon readers. From this perspective one asks how a poem preserves the affective structure of its imagery and transmits its emotional energy in the language of translation. In 'Himkhaṇḍ', the warmth of trust is endowed with the concrete sensation of 'raud', sunlight. Equivalence of feeling here is not simply an abstract restatement of sense; it also creates the possibility of a new sensory inflection. Even within the same field of meaning, words yield different poetic effects because of their cultural temperature and phonetic touch.

3.3 Toury: The Translated Work as a Text of the Target Culture

Gideon Toury's descriptive translation studies regard the translated work as an active text within the literary culture of the receiving language. In this light, the importance of Paghalait Himkhaṇḍ lies in how naturally the feelings of the Hindi poems take up residence within Maithili linguistic practice and cultural signs. The title, the arrangement of poems, the poet's statement, the translator's

preface, and the exchange between 'ham' and 'ahā̐' within the poems all help establish the collection's presence in the Maithili literary world.

3.4 Venuti and Lefevere: Domestication, Visibility, and Rewriting

Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization help identify differences of tone even between the closely related languages Hindi and Maithili. Expressions such as 'raud', 'pāg', 'jinagī', and 'ahā̐' bring the feeling of the Hindi original closer to the texture of Maithili life; yet the apparent naturalness of such choices does not make the translator's creative intervention invisible. Lefevere's account of rewriting discloses another aspect of the process: a translation is a new literary life for its source, in which publication, habits of reading, and the expressive possibilities of the receiving language participate in the making of meaning. Rewriting should be responsible poetic transformation, not license for arbitrary changes.

3.5 Gender-Conscious Translation: Voice, Authority, and Social Burden

Sherry Simon understands translation not as a gender-neutral transaction between words but as a possible cultural intervention. Read in this light, 'Nārī', 'Ājuk Nārī', 'Ekṭā Herāel Janānī', and 'Gharak Pāg' permit scrutiny of how women are represented, who is entitled to speak, how bodies are named, and how labour is organized within the home. One cannot simply assume that a poem's speaker is always the woman who wrote it. One may certainly ask, however, whom the poem allows to speak and whose life it places at the centre of interpretation.

3.6 Practical Linguistic Evaluation

Contemporary translation studies associated with Baker and Jones extend beyond lexical meaning to syntax, textual cohesion, pragmatic cues, and the ethics of translation. This essay therefore reads recurrent terms—'ahā̐', 'ham', 'o', 'janānī', 'ghar', 'ās', 'sapanā', and 'bisabās'—not as isolated units of sense, but as interrelated signs of address, personal relations, and social organization. The honorific register of 'ahā̐' sometimes contracts the distance between speaker and addressee and sometimes heightens the ethical burden of a question: this is a particularly telling pragmatic feature.

4. The Imagery of Nature, Memory, and Trust

4.1 Nature as a Laboratory of the Inner Life, Not Merely an Exterior Scene

The opening of 'Madhuban' evokes childhood longings, life's sweetness, and the sensation of memory returning. Its initial greenness is more than scenery: it becomes a means of rearranging time. From it an affective sequence of natural images reaches later poems such as 'Kuhes', 'Lahar', 'Āsak Ciṛe', and 'Himkhaṇḍ'. None of these images remains a purely objective description.

Frozen ice thaws in the light of trust; the bird becomes an aspiration, and the wave comes to figure the movement of a relationship.

It would be mistaken, then, to treat these natural images as illustrated documents of local geography. The 'mountain of ice' may be no literal sight on the Maithili-speaking river plain, but 'raud' gives an abstract warmth the touch of the everyday. Translation succeeds when an image drawn from nature finds an unforced extension of meaning in the new language. Its task here is less to reproduce the external world than to give feeling a visible configuration.

4.2 Hope, Despondency, and the Constant Return of Trust

In 'Bisabās', 'Sā̃cak Dharātal', 'Sā̃sak Saṅg', 'Sataraṅgā Ānand', and 'Bisabāsak Mūrti', the question of humanity's future appears in the forms of trust and inward strength. 'Bisabās' addresses its reader directly; breath, relations, song, and momentary rhythm enlarge the world of 'Sā̃sak Saṅg'; the plenitude of colour in 'Sataraṅgā Ānand' becomes a longing for renewed energy. Hope is not a feeling untouched by impediment: fractured memories, isolation, and the instability of relationships lie behind it. These affirmative utterances should accordingly be read as a counterforce to the more troubled experiences of the poetic sequence.

One critical distinction is essential. Where an experience is conveyed through imagery or the unfolding of an event, its feeling becomes persuasive; where a text becomes an immediate lesson in living, poetic pressure may slacken. The purport of some passages in 'Bisabās' and 'Sataraṅgā Ānand' is clear, but clarity is not in itself sufficient evidence of poetic merit. Readers participate affectively when direct injunction and artistic suggestion remain in productive balance.

4.3 The Search for Self, Memory, and the Unstable Ground of Existence

'Paricay' makes it possible to read identity as a changing inward condition rather than a fixed name. 'Ham Ketay Chalaũ' registers the unease of failing to find one's place within memory; the flight of 'Manak Kanakoā' figures the unfathomed reach of the mind; in 'Jinagīsā Kī Cāhe Chī', the speaker is uncertain of the object of desire. Rather than a coherent and decisive portrait of the modern self, these poems present a searching, incomplete, mutable voice.

The title 'Manak Bājār' links mental experience to the metaphors of exchange, crowds, and wandering, but the poem expresses an inward imperative through a negation such as 'phen nahi'. The brief utterance becomes a wish to emerge from social clamour into self-awareness. The market metaphor opens several paths to critical interpretation, but its density must be judged through the words' suggestions and experiences within the poem; importing unrelated social meanings would obscure its original tension.

5. Women's Identity: Body, Selfhood, Generations, and Home

5.1 'Nārī': A Question against Categorization

'Nārī' is among the collection's most consequential social poems. It questions the habitual tendency to reduce women to roles defined through relationships—as goddess, mother, object of worship, or the moral image of the family. Its demand to understand 'a woman simply as a woman' insists on recognizing her humanity outside allegory and veneration. The poem thus establishes critical distance between the traditional glorification of womanhood and the modern claim to an autonomous personality.

Reverence for women and recognition of their independent selfhood are not necessarily the same. A society may call a woman a goddess while leaving her labour, desire, and rights unrecognized. The humanistic force of the poem therefore lies less in celebrating female 'greatness' than in subjecting categories themselves to humane criticism. The domestic word 'janānī' in the Maithili text shifts interpretation away from Sanskritic abstraction toward a living person in ordinary speech.

5.2 'Ekṭā Herāel Janānī': The Presence of Absence within the Family

'Ekṭā Herāel Janānī' presents a profound social image of neglect. The title is itself paradoxical: the woman is present everywhere in the work of the home, yet her identity has disappeared. Children, men, service, family responsibilities, and her daily labour repeatedly appear in conjunction. Socially, the poem is not simply an elegy for private sorrow; it questions the unequal distribution of recognition, work, and entitlement inside the family.

Its distinctive strength lies in its narrative extension. Unlike the brief aphoristic poems, it traces a woman's existence through a range of circumstances and routines. The tension among work, identity, social recognition, and emotional invisibility constitutes the poetry. By using words such as 'apan', 'hamar', and 'nārī', together with the vocabulary of household practices, the Maithili text fashions a home that seems immediately related to the reader's own surroundings. That very familiarity, however, sharpens its criticism of those surroundings.

5.3 'Ājuk Nārī': The Double Meaning of Historical Change

In 'Ājuk Nārī', the word 'today's' signals historical consciousness. It does not merely designate contemporary fashion: it makes possible both a claim that women's position has changed and a test of that claim. Tradition, rupture, capability, and struggle are compressed into the poem's design. If the modern woman is idealized only as endlessly combative, accomplished, and long-suffering, an older burden may return in new guise. A productive reading distinguishes self-determination from this imposition of 'new duties'.

5.4 'Gharak Pāg': Elders, Experience, and Ethical Inheritance

'Gharak Pāg' interprets the place of the elderly through the emblem of familial honour, the 'pāg'. The ceremonial headgear is also a public sign of Mithila's cultural identity; within the poem it stands for respect for elders, their experience, and their legacy. The symbol carries a deep local resonance for a Maithili reader. Its ethical problem emerges between honouring a relative's experience as an adornment to the family and remaining indifferent to that person's actual needs.

The resulting social question concerns not honour alone but the relations of power within a household. It is possible to elevate an elder symbolically while neglecting that person's lived condition under the same roof. The poem urges the preservation of experience, although its idealized 'home' gives less voice to the complexity of intergenerational disagreement. This limitation is better identified as a choice of poetic perspective than condemned simply as a fault.

5.5 'Ghar' and 'Ghar āor Makān': The Nature of Intimate Space

Together, 'Ghar' and 'Ghar āor Makān' distinguish the home from the physical building by treating it as a lived space of relationships. A house is a structure; a home signifies intimacy and shared life. Yet read alongside 'Ekṭā Herāel Janānī' and 'Gharak Pāg', the distinction becomes difficult: if home is the place of affection, why does someone's identity disappear within it? This contradiction extends the collection's meaning beyond its explicitly didactic statements.

6. Linguistic Consciousness and the Questions of Public Life

6.1 'Rājbhāṣā': Identity, Rights, and the Affective Force of Constitutional Language

'Rājbhāṣā' brings into view the relations among naming a language, public recognition, and personal attachment. Language is associated with a country's identity, but also with belonging, acceptance, and an inward space of freedom. The poem's centre is not an extended explication of law; it is the emotional value of linguistic pride and intimate communication. In Maithili translation, this subject invites a fresh consideration of the relationship between two linguistic worlds.

The presence of 'Rājbhāṣā' in a collection translated from Hindi into Maithili creates an unusually charged critical context. Readers must consider where Maithili itself stands within relations between linguistic centre and periphery. This question arises as a critical possibility from the circumstances of the Maithili text, not as a demonstrable intention of the Hindi poet. Toury's target-culture perspective is especially useful here: a change of language can also transform the public questions a text raises.

6.2 'Vidyāk Bāṭ': Books, Education, and the Passage between Generations

In 'Vidyāk Bāṭ', village life and children's schooling are related to society's future. Education becomes more than an instrument of individual advancement: it is a means of transforming the community. A sequence of names—'Gabarā, Dhāpu, Lichmī, and Rāmī'—gives concrete identity to a world of boys and girls. Their familiar sounds carry the touch of vernacular existence, grounding the abstract ideal of education in the labour, wishes, and prospects of ordinary families.

Nearby in its concerns, 'Ahāk Thātī' raises questions of values, country, language, and responsibility. Inheritance is not a lifeless monument but a social action through which something passes to a new generation. Loyalty to homeland and tradition is the poem's ethical strength; yet a living cultural inheritance must also accommodate plurality, change, and equal rights. In this sense the poem creates an open dialogue between memory and the future.

7. A Facing Reading of the Title Poem: Ice, Affection, and the Sunlight of Trust

At the heart of 'Himkhaṇḍ' is the opposition between the coldness of relationships and the warmth of trust. Reading Chhabra's Hindi 'Himkhand' beside Prasad's Maithili 'Himkhaṇḍ' reveals both continuity of poetic meaning and differences of expression. The Hindi notions of 'cold relationships' and 'warmth' become 'shivering affection' and 'sunlight' in Maithili, bringing abstract states closer to everyday sensation.

Hindi: "पिघलते हैं हिमखंड सर्द रिश्तों के" ('the icebergs of cold relationships melt') — "प्यार सने विश्वास की उष्णता" ('the warmth of trust suffused with love'). Maithili: "पघलै छै बरफक पहाड़" ('the mountains of ice melt') — "ठिठुरलो सिनेहके" ('even shivering affection') — "विश्वासक रौद" ('the sunlight of trust').

The first transformation appears between the title and the body of the poem. The title retains the word 'himkhaṇḍ', but within the poem 'barafak pahāṛ' is more immediately visual, colloquial, and tangible. An abstract, Sanskrit-derived noun thus becomes for the local reader the sharply defined figure of a mountain made of ice. This is not an abandonment of sense but the visualization of an image.

Second is the movement from 'sard rishton' to 'ṭhiṭhurlo sineh'. In Hindi, coldness is a property of relationships; the Maithili 'ṭhiṭhurlo' makes affection itself resemble a body trembling with cold. Such personification heightens the tactile quality of feeling. At the same time, the wider social category of relationships contracts toward the more intimate domain of affection. Enlargement and narrowing of meaning are thus possible simultaneously.

Third, the substitution of 'raud' for 'uṣṇatā' is particularly important. 'Warmth' names an abstract quality of temperature, whereas 'raud' evokes the daily experience of the sun's rays. For Maithili readers, 'bisabāsak raud' can summon the natural comfort of sunshine on a winter's day. It is possible to regard this as a

gesture of domestication, insofar as translation renders an emotion through a familiar sensory medium. Yet the sun and sunlight are available as images in both Hindi and Maithili; they should not be made the basis of an absolute cultural division. The principal achievement is the visibility of the image and the humanization of warmth.

The Maithili poem concludes with 'da' ka dekhiyau'—an appeal to 'try giving it and see'. This address shifts the composition from categorical assertion toward an invitation that activates its listener. The honorific nuance of 'dekhiyau' creates a distinctive combination of courtesy and intimate distance. The Maithili system of address produces a pragmatic subtlety not measurable by dictionary equivalence alone.

The source poem's central configuration—relationships gone cold and the heat of trust—survives this facing comparison, but Maithili lexical choices endow it with body, touch, and light. The visual concreteness of 'barafak pahāṛ', the personification of 'ṭhiṭhurlo sineh', and the experiential warmth of 'bisabāsak raud' reveal the coexistence of semantic fidelity and formal innovation. The title poem thus becomes a representative image of the collection's wider emotional dialectic.

8. Diction, Syntactic Rhythm, and the Problems of Free Verse

8.1 Pronouns and Direct Address

The recurrence of 'ham', 'ahā̃', 'apan', 'hamar', and 'o' is more than a lexical habit. 'Ham' becomes a self-examining speaker, 'ahā̃' opens the prospect of dialogue, and 'apan' signals an entitlement to one's private life. In 'Bisabās', 'Himkhaṇḍ', 'Ahā̃k Thātī', and 'Bisabāsak Mūrti', the arrangement of address reshapes the sentence's rhythm and its ethical intimacy. Maithili forms of address carry markers of social distance; the translator's choice of pronoun is therefore central to the creation of meaning.

8.2 Multilingual Lexical Contact and Idiomatic Naturalness

The vocabulary brings words of Sanskritic origin—'viśvās', 'saṃsār', 'sambandh', and 'ātmīyatā'—into coexistence with vernacular terms such as 'raud', 'pāg', 'nenpan', 'jinagī', 'bujurg', and 'ahā̃'. This mixture cannot be apportioned across a simplistic division of 'pure' and 'impure' usage. Contemporary literary Maithili draws upon several lexical registers. The pertinent distinction is between a word that contributes necessarily to the structure of the poem's image and one that merely increases its prose-like abstraction.

The naturalness of Maithili expression is a significant accomplishment in many poems, although the collection is not uniformly concentrated in its art. At some points the dominance of a sententious manner diminishes the image's plurality of meanings. The brief voice of 'Carcā', the sensibility of 'Besudh', and the expansiveness of 'Sukh–Dukh' reveal different proportions of moral instruction

and experiential metaphor. To discriminate among these modes is indispensable to a fair literary estimate of the whole collection.

8.3 Line Breaks, Silence, and Resonance

Free verse means more than the breaking of lines: every pause participates in a reader's breathing, expectation, and construction of sense. In 'Himkhaṇḍ', the arrival of 'raud' after 'bisabāsak' opens a new sensation through a momentary suspension. In 'Sāšak Saṅg', alternation between shorter and longer phrases gives love, heartbeat, and song an interior rhythm. By contrast, excessively fractured lines in certain poems do not create the expected poetic tension; the arrangement can then feel somewhat ornamental.

8.4 Repetition: Music and Limitation

Refrains such as 'ham jinagīsā...', the recurring openings with 'ahā' or 'ā' in several poems, and the sustained presence of 'bisabās' form a shared thread of feeling. Repetition brings the poetic voice back into the reader's memory, but without sufficient variation meaning may remain where it began. The succession of colours in 'Sataraṅgā Ānand' produces energy; in 'Manak Kanakoā', reiterated expansion becomes an echo of flight. The effects depend on the text in question.

9. The Social Geography of Metaphor: Home, Sky, Fairground, and Road

Four recurring configurations emerge from the book's imagery: home and house, sky and space, path and journey, crowd and solitude. 'Melā Me Esgār' presents the paradox of loneliness amid a crowd. 'Kuhes' names an indistinct experience through nature; 'Diṅgtak Najīk' attempts to bring distance nearer to desire; 'Lahar' offers a visible figure for emotional upheaval. Together they define the feeling-world of a contemporary person who may be socially connected and inwardly alone.

In 'Kenā Bisari Sake Chī?', memory becomes an ethical responsibility opposed to oblivion; 'Kāraṇ' confronts the difficulty of life's questions and answers; 'Bahae Diau Jinagīkē' asks that life be allowed to flow rather than held back. One voice wishes to escape constraint, while another fears the pain of abandoning relationships. Their coexistence constitutes the collection's inward narrative: neither absolute renunciation nor settled submission.

To evaluate this variety adequately, one must distinguish 'internal coherence' from a 'philosophical system'. Images of home, memory, expectation, and trust change one another's significance, but that does not justify treating the poems as examples of a fully articulated philosophical doctrine. Such a reading would deprive the collection of its actual poetic openness.

10. Social Meanings of the Translated Text: Nation, Family, and Communal Inheritance

Read together, 'Ahāk Thātī' and 'Rājbhāṣā' show that the 'I' of this collection is not confined to private love. It also enters questions of a language's dignity, the welfare of the country, compassion between generations, and cultural continuity. The children of 'Vidyāk Bāṭ', the elders of 'Gharak Pāg', and the selfhood claimed in 'Nārī' together develop a social ethics. It is not equally elaborated everywhere, but it constitutes an independent line of thought within the collection.

Poetry celebrating nation, mother tongue, or home always risks making other voices inaudible. Accordingly, the ideals of 'Ahāk Thātī' must be read alongside questions of social plurality and an inheritance capable of change. The preservation of tradition is a positive value if it accommodates everyone's experience; if it elevates a single social code to unquestioned supremacy, the poem requires critical rereading. It opens these larger questions without articulating a determinate political programme.

11. Literary Milieu and the Cultural Dialogue of Poetry

Seen through the book's prefaces and sequence of poems, the joint literary undertaking of Rajni Chhabra and Shiv Kumar Prasad appears as an active cultural dialogue. The significance of this Maithili collection published at Nirmali in 2018 is not simply that Hindi poetry has reached another language; it introduces fresh sensibility into established and changing idioms of Maithili verse. The wide range of its sixty-three poems moves the reader continually between intimate experience and the questions of public life.

The book's presence in Maithili literary circles testifies to the literary existence of translated poetry. Its poetic significance, however, should not be judged by the extent of its publicity or circulation, but by the internal arrangement of feeling and the artistic means of the texts themselves. The readily apprehended image of 'raud', the dialogic voice of 'ahā̐', the social question carried by 'janānī', and the cultural weight of 'thātī' give the translation its life as poetry. The central question of literary reception is consequently not how many people have read the book, but what new meanings its poems make possible in language and feeling.

Chhabra's poems have been read within Hindi literary culture in the light of private experience and women's sensibilities. The Maithili Paghalait Himkhaṇḍ further enlarges their social import: 'Rājbhāṣā', 'Vidyāk Bāṭ', and 'Ahāk Thātī' address linguistic dignity, public education, and inheritance. Recognition of this plurality is a condition of adequate criticism. To reduce women's experience to separation or sentimentality alone would conceal the social questions of the writing.

The poet's reflections on 'anusṛjan' regard translation as an undertaking of literary and cultural encounter. That aspiration takes tangible form in the

sounds, rhythms, and images of Maithili poetry. Linguistic goodwill by itself cannot secure the success of a translation; successful translation of poetry occurs when an expression such as ‘bisabāsak raud’ acquires inward life in the new language, and literary criticism scrutinizes its effects with precision.

12. Critical Counterarguments: Strengths and Artistic Difficulties

12.1 Substantive Achievements

The first achievement is the unforced communication of feeling in Maithili. In many places the line of thought is close to local life; choices such as ‘raud’, ‘pāg’, ‘jinagī’, and ‘ahā’ do not imprison sensibility within an unnatural mould. Second, the collection gives sharp expression to matters such as women's social invisibility. Third, short lyrics coexist with relatively extended compositions, creating a plurality of poetic forms—maxim, soliloquy, address, and narrative scene. Fourth, it seeks to connect intimate memories with language, education, and social inheritance.

12.2 The Imbalance between Poetry and Maxim

Alongside these achievements, excessive explicitness of statement is the central difficulty. A poem extends its beauty where it allows readers to pose questions; when the answer is predetermined, the maxim may constrain their experience. The values intended in ‘Bisabās’ and ‘Sataraṅgā Ānand’ are humane, but literary value does not automatically arise from the expression of good wishes. Concrete images, unexpected shifts of sense, creative silence, and tension of voice are no less necessary.

12.3 Orthography, Idiom, and Linguistic Consistency

A form such as ‘bisabās’ differs from the standardized Sanskrit-derived ‘viśvās’ and reveals a tendency in Maithili phonology. To declare that difference automatically erroneous would be unjust to linguistic diversity. The pertinent issue is the kind of consistency, naturalness, and sonic coherence such a form creates within a poem. Likewise, the coexistence of Sanskritic abstract terms with domestic folk vocabulary enriches meaning in many places while making certain sentences sound like prose. The translator's linguistic attentiveness must be judged within this subtle tension.

12.4 The Dual Test of Fidelity and Maithili Poeticity

Both the preservation of meaning and a creative effect are indispensable in evaluating translated poetry. A facing reading of ‘Himkhaṇḍ’ shows how the original's metaphor of cold and heat remains continuous while acquiring greater visual clarity in Maithili. But this success of meaning cannot serve as an automatic artistic verdict on every poem. The relations among metaphor, address, rhythm, recurrence, and silence must be tested in each work; praise or

criticism of a translation then rests on the actual texture of poetry, not on unsupported assertion.

13. Integrated Assessment: Translation as a Literary Event

The poetic possibilities of Paghalait Himkhaṇḍ are notable at three levels. First is the movement of feeling across languages: an image receives new breath as it passes from its Hindi context into Maithili vocabulary. Second is the social extension of women's identity: questions of personal relationships reach into domestic work, recognition, generations, education, and language. Third is the literary activity that the translation brings to Maithili print culture: both the originating poet and the translator remain clearly identified, sustaining a tradition of creative accountability.

Jakobson's linguistic difference, Nida's criterion of readerly effect, Toury's location within the receiving literature, Venuti's linguistic-cultural mediation, Lefevere's rewriting, and Simon's consciousness of gender do not replace one another; each frames a different enquiry. Their usefulness here has been measured by close attention to poetic lines, not by attaching poems from outside to serve as convenient exempla of theory.

On the whole, the Maithili text's clear strengths are its intimate address, its household imagery grounded in experience, and its representation of women's social questions. Its limitations emerge in the formulaic quality of some poems, their inclination to arrive rapidly at explicit conclusions, and the uneven intensity of their art. Evaluation therefore yields a layered literary judgement, not a one-line certificate of either 'complete success' or 'failure'.

14. Conclusion

Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad's Maithili translation of Rajni Chhabra's Hindi poems, Paghalait Himkhaṇḍ, is a noteworthy example of interlingual transfer and creative relocation. Translated poems do not merely transport component meanings; they take new shape in a Maithili reader's hearing, everyday speech, recollections, social relationships, and cultural symbols. In the facing reading of 'Himkhaṇḍ', the change from 'warmth' to 'sunlight', and from 'cold relationships' to 'shivering affection', is of particular significance. These minute transformations show that creative translation of poetry can preserve meaning while giving experience a new form.

The collection's creative achievement also lies in its thematic plurality. 'Nārī' questions women's humanity; 'Ekṭā Herāel Janānī' becomes social criticism of invisible domestic labour; 'Rājbhāṣā' and 'Ahāँ Thātī' make language and cultural inheritance subjects of argument; 'Gharak Pāg' raises the question of symbolic honour and dishonour within the family; 'Bisabāsak Mūrti' concludes the collection with the wish to rebuild trust. These poems carry translated verse beyond the narrow circumference of love and solitude.

The integrated literary judgement, then, is that Paghalait Himkhaṇḍ chiefly succeeds in giving Hindi sensibility a new arrangement of Maithili intimacy, cultural imagery, and address. The collection is not uniformly intense: the aphoristic quality of certain passages and premature closure of statements constrain its poetic possibilities. Nevertheless, reading 'Nārī', 'Ekṭā Herāel Janānī', 'Gharak Pāg', 'Rājbhāṣā', and 'Himkhaṇḍ' together establishes a clear achievement: this translation joins private feeling to social thought and enlarges the literary horizon of contemporary Maithili translated poetry.

Appendix: A Thematic-Critical Table of Selected Poems

The following table brings together the subjects, symbols, and principal critical possibilities of selected poems in the collection. It may be read as a guide to their relationships with one another.

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Kṣitij: People's Poetry, Bilingual Fiction, and the Ideal of Collective Life

An Extended Literary-Critical Review of Three Essays on Nāgārjun and Anūp Lāl Maṇḍal in Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad's Kṣitij

Abstract

Three essays in Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad's critical collection Kṣitij—'Nāgārjun kā Kāvya Sansār', 'Nāgārjun kā Hindī aur Maithilī Upanyās Sāhitya mẽ Yogdān', and 'Vyaṣṭi se Samaṣṭi ke Racanākār Anūp Lāl Maṇḍal'—approach the social concerns of modern North Indian literature on three distinct generic planes. The first employs the triad 'committed–connected–bound' to encompass Nāgārjun's political thought, feeling for nature, and intimate world; the second opens a perspective on rural class struggle, women's situation, and linguistic inequality in Maithili–Hindi fiction; and the sixth essay examines the tensions among individual ideals, social reform, love, sacrifice, and narrative craft in Anūp Lāl Maṇḍal's novels. Comparing these essays demonstrates that literature's commitment to ordinary people cannot be interpreted apart from the aesthetic structures of particular works. The strength of Prasad's criticism lies in its ethical commitment and concern for neglected experience; its limitations sometimes appear in celebratory adjectives, thematic classification, and relatively abbreviated treatment of the source texts' formal organization. By considering the interrelations of Maithili, Hindi, and Angika literature, inconsistencies in publication history, and the relation between content and form, this review clarifies both the book's critical contribution and its further possibilities.

Keywords: Shiv Kumar Prasad; Kṣitij; Nāgārjun; Yātrī; Anūp Lāl Maṇḍal; people's poetry; Maithili–Hindi bilingualism; novelistic form; Kosi region.

1. Critical Context: Literature, Society, and Evaluative Perspective

Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad's Kṣitij is a collection of critical essays in Hindi; its second edition was published by Pallavi Prakashan, Nirmali. The first essay treats Nāgārjun's poetry, the second his Hindi and Maithili novels, and the sixth the fictional world of Anūp Lāl Maṇḍal. Bringing together people's poetry, bilingual fiction, and a reformist novelistic tradition within one volume is not incidental. A shared foundation of the critic's interests is the placement of social responsibility at the centre of literary value.

The present evaluation reads Prasad's selected poems, narrative episodes, characters, lists of novels, and critical judgements in relation to one another while testing both the artistic force of his argument and its limits. Its subject is Prasad's critical interpretation; consequently his views about the primary works, the writers' available statements about themselves, and evidence from other dependable literary histories are identified separately. Such distinctions do not

diminish the density of literary meaning; rather, they clarify the boundaries between disputed facts and interpretive propositions.

A question returns throughout the three selected essays: are the political resistance of a people's poet, the rural world of a fiction writer, and a novelist's moral idealism all the same kind of commitment to the people? No answer is possible without recognizing differences of genre between poetry and fiction, distinctions of language and readership, and the social agency of characters. The achievement of Kṣitij lies in bringing the question into literary history. Its most fruitful rereading would give that question greater critical depth.

Poetry, rural life, and the public argument of criticism

2. 'Nāgārjun kā Kāvya Sansār': Commitment to the People and Poetic Plurality

2.1 Committed, Connected, and Bound: Three Terms, Three Domains

The first essay takes three semantic strands from Nāgārjun's poem 'Pratibaddha Hū̃'—commitment, connection, and attachment—as its organizing principle. In Prasad's reading, commitment means siding with the struggle of the exploited; connection means the poet's active relation to nature, society, and changing circumstances; attachment means an emotional tie with those close to him. This threefold design prevents Nāgārjun's poetic identity from being

restricted to political proclamation. Resistance to injustice coexists with tenderness, love, nature, and memory, revealing the larger amplitude of his sensibility.

Useful as the triad is, it should not be understood as a set of rigid compartments. Political commitment can carry the warmth of personal experience; connection with nature acquires social meaning through cultivation, labour, the seasons, and hunger; and attachment to one's family may break its limits to become a more inclusive human intimacy. Prasad's thesis would become stronger by placing greater emphasis on these interrelations. If commitment is the ethical direction of the poetry, connectedness its experiential field, and attachment the concrete human ground of its feeling, the three categories enrich one another.

2.2 Satire, Power, and Poetic Rhetoric

In treating poems opposed to political authority, Prasad locates 'Āo Rānī Ham Ḍhoyẽge Pālkī', 'Śāsan kī Bandūk', 'Indu Jī', and the satire concerning Bal Thackeray within a democratic poetic current. His selection shows that Nāgārjun's satire is not a generalized morality tale but an effective mode of intervention in contemporary public life. In 'Śāsan kī Bandūk', the opposition between the dominance of weaponry and the cuckoo's unrestrained voice affirms life's independent rhythm amid the display of state power. Satire here is not merely political dissent; it also exposes the contradictions of official language.

The social effects of satire and its poetic construction need to be read together. Repetition, public address, and the sign of labour in 'Āo Rānī Ham Ḍhoyẽge Pālkī' link the tradition of colonial pomp to the official spectacle of independent India, producing critical meaning. Nāgārjun's poems that name public figures can enter collective memory, but analysis of their humour, metre, irony, and syntax must go beyond descriptions of political courage. Prasad chooses apt examples; a more detailed treatment of their formal devices would nevertheless make the discussion more concentrated.

2.3 Family Affection, Lowly Creatures, and the World of Things

An important accomplishment is the critic's attempt to read the poet who opposes governments alongside the poet of a child's smile, paternal affection, the memory of a sister-in-law, and the rural environment. His attention to 'Vah Danturit Muskān' shows that the people's poet is not inimical to private tenderness. Alongside it appear the sow in 'Paine Dā̃tõ Vālī', and the one-eyed bitch, hearth, grinding stone, and crow of 'Akāl aur Uske Bād'. The social history of hunger is not confined here to human bodies; domestic implements, animals, and the courtyard together compose a shared environment of deprivation.

A finer critical distinction is needed at this point. The personification of the 'weeping hearth' is more than an ornamental figure: it represents the failure of the household's means of production and reproduction. The one-eyed bitch reveals the shared vulnerability of humans and animals in a time without grain.

Describing the sow brings a socially devalued creature within the dignity of national motherhood, an aesthetic reassessment of what has been deemed 'unpleasant' in poetry. Yet it is not enough to call these images an enlargement of compassion: the tensions among caste notions of purity and pollution, nationalist tropes of the 'mother', and the dignity of living creatures also require examination.

2.4 Sonic Beauty and the Diversity of Poetic Forms

The sound-driven repetitions of 'Megh Baje' and the Sanskritic, visually abundant vocabulary of 'Amal Dhaval Giri' open two distinct possibilities of Nāgārjun's poetic language to Prasad. His movement between accessible folk speech and classical vocabulary is not merely lexical variety: it also transforms rhythm and image in accordance with the subject. When a poet of acute popular struggles composes the sounds and sights of nature, meaning arises from a joint activity of sensation and artistic form. Nāgārjun's coexistence of metrical and non-metrical verse further substantiates this expressive range.

One limitation of the essay is that terms of approval such as 'incomparable' and 'wonderful' appear relatively frequently after an example. To establish poetic excellence, however, criticism must unfold the sequence of images, repetitions of sound, the social function of vernacular address, and the internal rhythm of Sanskritic diction. What is needed is not a division between the social importance and aesthetic construction of poetry, but an account of their reciprocal relations.

2.5 Multilingualism: Essential to the Poetic World, but Insufficiently Examined

Prasad acknowledges the plurality of compositions in Maithili, Hindi, Sanskrit, and Bengali, yet his poetic examples centre more heavily on Hindi. Consequently, the Maithili creative identity of 'Yātrī' risks becoming an appendix to the Hindi world of 'Nāgārjun'. A sustained discussion of the different linguistic structures, folk experiences, images, and forms of address in 'Citrā' and 'Patrahīn Nagna Gāchh' would have balanced this comprehensive poetic perspective. The institutional record concerning the Sahitya Akademi award year for 'Patrahīn Nagna Gāchh' also supplies a useful literary-historical point of reference.

The first essay's special value, then, lies in recognizing the simultaneous presence of resistance, intimacy, and attachment to nature within Nāgārjun. If the particular voices, techniques, and historical circumstances of poems were distinguished more fully within this composite picture, Prasad's 'committed–connected–bound' proposition could develop further as a critical method.

3. 'Nāgārjun kā Hindī aur Maithilī Upanyās Sāhitya mẽ Yogdān': Society, Language, and Narrative Art

3.1 The Meaning and Limits of Comparison with Premchand

The second essay places Nāgārjun's journey through two languages alongside Premchand's Urdu–Hindi literary career. The comparison rests on changes of language, the representation of rural social realities, and the fictional recognition of oppressed lives. Yet Premchand's and Nāgārjun's narrative societies are not historically identical. Agrarian struggles, caste discipline, women's lives, and the place of local speech in Mithila assume distinctive forms in Nāgārjun's novels. Comparison should therefore examine different life-worlds and modes of narration rather than arrange writers on a simple scale of progressivism.

Prasad draws on Nāgārjun's own statements to consider the difficulties of bilingual literary production. The limited opportunities to publish in Maithili, the need to translate for Hindi-speaking listeners at literary gatherings, and the practical pressure to reach a wider readership all formed part of Nāgārjun's linguistic experience. His essay 'Maithilī aur Hindī' links those experiences to the insistence that Maithili receive recognition as an independent literary language. At this point, Prasad moves the question of language choice beyond individual creative preference toward institutional inequality and the circulation of literature.

3.2 The Usefulness and Limits of Five Thematic Categories

Prasad organizes his discussion of the novels into five aspects: historical context, social life, women's lives, economic life, and political life. This schema makes it possible to relate Gaurī in 'Ratināth kī Cācī', peasant labour in 'Balcanmā', fishing communities in 'Varuṇ ke Beṭe', the marriage question in 'Naī Paudh', social reform in 'Dukhmocan', and communal consciousness in 'Bābā Baṭesarnāth'. Its value is that it allows numerous characters and circumstances to be read within a broad social question.

Social, economic, and political life, however, do not occur in separate compartments within a novel. Landlord oppression operates through relations of land and labour, but is sustained by caste hierarchy and state protection. Women's constraints in marriage are linked to property rights and unequal household labour as well as moral convention. Thus Prasad's fivefold plan produces a thematic map of the novels, but the dynamic composition of character, plot, and power requires reading across the divisions he establishes.

3.3 Class, Caste, Labour, and Locality

Three examples demonstrate the concentration of Prasad's social outlook: the landlord's authority and peasant punishment in 'Balcanmā', the collective struggle of fishing people in 'Varuṇ ke Beṭe', and village memory and the

banyan-tree metaphor in 'Bābā Baṭesarnāth'. Rivers, ponds, fields, orchards, and village communities in Mithila are more than scenic backdrops: they are grounds of livelihood, rights, recollection, and resistance. Nāgārjun's regionalism thus emerges not merely as the use of local words but as a lived geography of resources and social power.

The critic's perspective is valuable where he joins religious and social pretension to poignant narrative episodes. Yet comparatively little attention is paid to the novels' internal narrators, their ordering of time, the construction of class vocabulary, distinctions of speech in dialogue, and the gradual development of characters' political consciousness. A 'depiction of society' is not the same thing as the novelistic organization of that depiction. Which experience is narrated from whose perspective determines the qualitative texture of its social meaning.

3.4 Women Characters: From Pity to Agency

In naming characters such as Gaurī, Pārvatī, Madhurī, Ugnī, and Campā, Prasad brings to the fore the distress of women's lives, social insecurity, and unequal marriages. The communal moral accusation against Gaurī in 'Ratināth kī Cācī' and the marital imbalance of 'Pāro' reveal society's discipline over female bodies. His sympathies lie with exploited women, although the terms 'compassion' and 'women's uplift' predominate in his explanation. A further stage of narrative criticism should also centre women's decisions, labour, desire, protest, and speaking voices.

Which narrative voice articulates a woman's experience? How does her silence acquire meaning within a story? What limits do male characters' moral decisions impose on that voice? Questions of this kind would make the study of women characters more exact. Distinguishing reformist sympathy from women's actual agency deepens rather than weakens the social import of Prasad's examples.

3.5 The Maithili Text, Original Language, and the 'Balcanmā' Dispute

The discussion of Maithili prose is a particularly attractive part of the second essay. Prasad refers to 'Pāro', 'Navaturiyā', and 'Balcanmā', cites examples of Maithili idiom, and disputes the critical view of Durganath Jha 'Shreesh'. His objections concerning the continuing social relevance of 'Navaturiyā' and the local speech of 'Balcanmā' point to an important ongoing debate in Maithili criticism. Yet the language of original composition, printed editions, and the sequence of translations are distinct historical questions; a single conjecture cannot settle them all.

Kīrtinārāyaṇ Miśra records different printing years for the Hindi and Maithili versions of 'Balcanmā'; Nāgārjun, meanwhile, states in his essay 'Maithilī aur Hindī' that the novel was originally written in Maithili. Both the author's account of composition and the chronology of published editions matter as evidence. The language of the earliest printing is not automatically that of the earliest writing; nor does an author's testimony establish every textual variation

between editions. Prasad's question can be developed rigorously only through a comparative examination of the original editions.

According to Prasad, the social questions raised by 'Navaturiyā' are not confined to a vanished age. His argument is strongest in recognizing continuities in social institutions and women's lives. Yet the endurance of a problem must not be mistaken for an unchanged form. The novel can retain both its historicity and its contemporary relevance when read in the light of transformations in marriage, patriarchy, and gender inequality.

Understanding the relationship between the Hindi and Maithili versions requires attention to local lexical forms, the rhythms of oral speech, narratorial idiom, characters' dialogue, and the reception of stories among different readerships. Such analysis could determine whether a version reduces or changes a regional voice, whether it is a translation or an authorial rewriting. Prasad's linguistic attentiveness points toward this kind of comparative criticism.

3.6 Realism, Ideology, and the Form of the Novel

Although social justice is central to these novels, each develops its own mode of narration. The speaking banyan of 'Bābā Baṭesarnāth', the autobiographical intimacy of 'Balcanmā', the social organization of marriage in 'Naī Paudh', and the presentation of collective struggle in 'Varuṇ ke Beṭe' are different novelistic devices. A closer account of narrative perspective, the ordering of time, memory, and the rhythms of dialogue would clarify the artistic organization of social realism.

The second essay's principal achievement is to establish the centrality of Maithili experience in criticism of Hindi novels. Mithila's village society, forms of oppression, and vernacular consciousness create an internal relation between Hindi and Maithili literature. Despite the comparable social commitments of poetry and fiction, an adequate assessment must also recognize the independent formal procedures of narrative.

4. 'Vyaṣṭi se Samaṣṭi ke Racanākār Anūp Lāl Maṇḍal': Fiction, Ideals, and Tragic Sensibility

4.1 From Biography to Literary Judgement

The essay on Anūp Lāl Maṇḍal begins with the writer's love of his birthplace, moral steadfastness, and participation in the freedom struggle. Through a reference to an interview by Candranārāyaṇ Singh, Prasad emphasizes Maṇḍal's deep attachment to the land of the Kosi. His refusal to apply for a freedom-fighter's pension becomes an example of selfless principle. Such biographical details help explain the writer's world of values; a judgement of his novels' artistry, however, also requires independent examination of plots, characters, and narrative methods.

The movement 'from individual to collective' suggests an extension of personal moral conviction into the wider good of the people. But reformist fiction raises a serious question: does the glorification of sacrifice enlarge the freedom of individual desire within the fictional world, or does it constrain that freedom? The social commitments of Maṇḍal's idealistic characters, the agency of women, and the tendency to close narratives with pain or death expose this tension.

4.2 The Range of Works and Their Literary-Historical Significance

Prasad provides an extensive catalogue of Maṇḍal's novels, including original Hindi novels, translated works, Angika novels, and unpublished compositions. He reconstructs a broad writing career through 'Nirvāsitā', 'Samāj kī Vedī par', 'Sākī', 'Jyotirmayī', 'Rūp–Rekhā', 'Savitā', 'Mīmāṃsā', 'Ve Abhāge', 'Das Bīghā Zamīn', 'Jvālā', 'Āvārō kī Duniyā', 'Dard kī Tasvīrẽ', 'Bujhne na Pāy', 'Rakt aur Raṅg', 'Abhiyān kā Path', 'Kendra aur Paridhi', 'Tūfān aur Tinke', and 'Uttar–Puruṣ'. Bringing together the works of a writer who has almost passed out of public memory is a genuine contribution to literary history.

Some publication years in this catalogue differ from those given elsewhere. Discrepancies are especially apparent in accounts of the first edition of 'Nirvāsitā' and the date of the Angika work 'Nayā Sūraj–Nayā Cān'. These differences do not diminish Maṇḍal's literary achievement; they draw attention instead to the importance of first editions, publication histories, and the archival record of regional-language writing. A definitive date requires evidence from the publisher. Until then, it is more judicious to treat Prasad's list as the catalogue he has assembled, rather than as an incontrovertible chronology.

The importance of a list of works lies not only in the number of titles but in the history of reaching different social strata through different kinds of writing. Once original novels, translations, Angika compositions, and unpublished manuscripts are treated as distinct parts of a literary career, changes of language and expansions of readership acquire separate meanings. Prasad's list supplies a basis for such broader enquiry.

4.3 Thematic Classification and the Question of Narrative Technique

Prasad classifies Maṇḍal's novels into four categories: social, realist, national-movement-related, and psychological. The appearance of 'Sākī' under both the social and psychological headings indicates how frequently the worlds of novels overlap. Psychological conflict cannot be separated from social discipline, and national consciousness also confronts characters' private desires. The study of predominant and subsidiary tendencies reveals formal diversity better than rigid categories.

In treating technique, Prasad identifies the epistolary structures of 'Samāj kī Vedī par' and 'Dard kī Tasvīrẽ', the diary form of 'Jyotirmayī', and the psychological dimensions of 'Savitā', 'Mīmāṃsā', 'Rakt aur Raṅg', and 'Kendra aur Paridhi'. When a story is told through letters, characters select what they disclose of their experience; intervals between letters allow the reader to infer the unspoken. In a

diary, the difference between immediate sensation and subsequent self-assessment becomes important. Prasad recognizes these formal possibilities, although close analysis of particular narrative scenes would make his argument more compelling.

4.4 Women Characters, Love, and Ethical Idealism

Prasad arrives at a notable moment of self-criticism in assessing Maṇḍal's fictional world. Alongside the ideals of love, duty, social service, and renunciation, the lives of many characters move toward tragic conclusions. One character gives up the wish to marry, another becomes the victim of violent repression, and another's love remains unfulfilled. Prasad regards the recurrence as a sign of elevated idealism but also acknowledges an artistic weakness. When an unexpected tragic ending suppresses a character's organic development, pathos may overwhelm the freedom of the plot.

From the standpoint of women characters, the question becomes sharper. How many decisions about love, marriage, and public action are genuinely theirs, and how many are subordinated to male characters' moral ideals? In discussing 'Samāj kī Vedī par', Geetashree emphasizes its epistolary method and the dignity of a woman confronting social ostracism. Set beside Prasad's compassionate outlook, such a woman-centred reading illuminates crucial distinctions among reformist sentimentality, social resistance, and female autonomy.

To question Maṇḍal's recurrent tragic movement is not to reject his social ideals. The question is whether a tragic ending develops necessarily from a narrative or seems imposed from outside to glorify an ideal. Morality acquires poetic truth when it grows out of characters' lived experiences; it may become instruction when it closes off narrative alternatives. Prasad's criticism opens a path toward this subtle distinction.

4.5 The Social Ground of the Kosi and Wider Humanity

Prasad sees Maṇḍal's literary sensibility emerging from experience of the Kosi region and moving toward wider human questions. Landlord exploitation, women's social insecurity, obstacles to love, and conflicts around the national movement intersect in the plots he examines. Yet 'universal' humanity becomes distinctive only when the concrete locality of Kosi land relations, rural labour, the riverine environment, and social discipline is not effaced. The breadth of Maṇḍal's fictional world depends on preserving its regional grounding.

Other published criticism of 'Tūfān aur Tinke' discusses the historical background of peasant struggles and the figure of Nakshatra Malakar. Such references suggest that Maṇḍal's novels can be read in relation to agrarian and social movements, not merely as stories of compassion or individual sacrifice. Any larger reassessment of his oeuvre will need to attend closely to the relationship between political history and narrative structure.

At the end of the essay, Prasad calls for the republication of Maṇḍal's rare works. This is not simply a tribute; it is a concrete condition of literary criticism. Accessible texts allow examination of narrators, characters, linguistic forms, variant editions, and contemporary reception. Authoritative editing and renewed critical reading would be complementary steps in building a new readership for Maṇḍal.

5. The Three Critical Essays: Shared Concerns and Differences of Genre

5.1 Democratic Resistance and Reformist Ideals

The essay on Nāgārjun's verse identifies the voice of outspoken public resistance; the essay on his fiction finds that concern with the people in the conflicts of rural life and the social realities of characters; the discussion of Maṇḍal traces an ethical expansion from personal ideals to collective welfare. All three affirm the dignity of 'the people', but their role changes. In poetry the people are participants and listeners capable of resistance; in Nāgārjun's fiction they are struggling peasants, women, and village communities; in Maṇḍal's novels they become the object of moral reform and at times its active agents. Without attention to these differences, 'commitment to the people' loses its critical edge.

Comparing Nāgārjun's tendency toward collective resistance with the moral stature of self-sacrificing protagonists in Maṇḍal's novels raises important ideological questions. On one side is the desire to change exploitative structures; on the other the conviction that individuals' ideals can transform society's consciousness. It would be mistaken to make these absolute opposites, but Prasad's examples do map two distinct tendencies in literary thought.

5.2 Critical Voice: Balancing Sympathy and Discrimination

Throughout the three essays, Prasad's language is filled with deep respect for the writers' social dedication. Such ethical involvement is not inherently a weakness of criticism: it allows the critic to recognize the problems of neglected people, women, and regional lives. Evaluative epithets such as 'unprecedented' and 'incomparable', however, become convincing only when joined to specific reasons involving images, plots, characters, narrators, or linguistic structure. The balance between the warmth of praise and the precision of analysis is among the collection's most important critical tests.

In the essay on Maṇḍal, Prasad shows restraint toward his own moral sympathy by acknowledging the limitation of tragedy-dominated narrative design. If similar discrimination were extended to the topicality of Nāgārjun's political poems, variants of bilingual works, and disparities of narrative method among novels, all three critical essays would acquire a more evenly sustained seriousness.

5.3 Maithili, Hindi, and Angika: Dialogue Rather than Uniformity

It is insufficient to regard Maithili–Hindi writing merely as one author's capacity to work in two languages. Linguistic literary history is formed through relationships among readership, published editions, translation, prestige, awards, and literary institutions. Nāgārjun's identity as 'Yātrī' belongs to an independent Maithili poetic tradition, which should not be subsumed by criticism of his Hindi verse. The mention of Maṇḍal's Angika writing likewise shows that this region's multilingual literary geography extends beyond Hindi and Maithili. Kṣitij opens this dialogue, although the separate literary structures of the languages deserve further attention.

5.4 Evidence in Criticism and Historical Discrimination

There is no opposition between interpretive freedom and factual accuracy. The poems quoted by Prasad, his novelistic examples, and biographical accounts have their distinct critical uses; however, authors' autobiographical testimony, institutional award records, publishers' bibliographical descriptions, and subsequent critics' views are not interchangeable forms of evidence. Such distinctions enable a more balanced understanding of disputes concerning Nāgārjun's bilingual career and Maṇḍal's extensive bibliography.

6. Poetic History and Bibliographies: Necessary Cautions in Interpretation

The Sahitya Akademi's institutional list gives 1968 as the award year for 'Patrahīn Nagna Gāchh', while some introductory accounts record 1969. The significance of the discrepancy lies not in judging the poem's quality but in writing an accurate literary history. For the award year, the relevant institution's list should serve as primary evidence; placing an alternative date from a later introduction beside it without explanation merely creates confusion.

In the case of 'Balcanmā', the language of original composition and the chronology of surviving editions are separate questions. Prasad discusses the world of Maithili fiction; Kīrtinārāyaṇ Miśra supplies a sequence of printings; Nāgārjun states that he originally wrote in Maithili. Criticism benefits from acknowledging the differences among these kinds of testimony. The disagreement does not reduce the novel's social importance; rather, it reveals the intricate history of literary movement between Maithili and Hindi.

Differing accounts also exist of publication years for Anūp Lāl Maṇḍal's 'Nirvāsitā' and his Angika novel. Rather than turning a discrepancy into a definitive pronouncement, it is fairer to regard Prasad's catalogue as an important preliminary document of literary history. Research founded on first editions and trustworthy library catalogues could clarify the archival question.

7. Conclusion: From Social Concern to Formal Literary Criticism

A comprehensive reading of the three selected essays in Kṣitij shows that Dr Shiv Kumar Prasad regards literature's social commitment as the ethical foundation of criticism. In Nāgārjun's poetry he identifies the conjunction of opposition to authority and intimate human sympathy; in Hindi–Maithili novels he explores rural conflict, women's suffering, and social transformation; in Anūp Lāl Maṇḍal he interprets the relations between an idealistic individual and wider society. The three essays thereby permit critical dialogue among different expressions of literature connected with ordinary people.

The first essay's triad 'committed–connected–bound' is a useful introduction to a comprehensive reading of poetry; it could be expanded through closer attention to sound, imagery, historical contexts, and the idiom of Maithili verse. The second establishes the centrality of Mithila's rural experience to the relation between Hindi and Maithili fiction, but requires deeper consideration of narratorial form, the intersections of caste, class, and gender, and the historical complexity of the languages of composition. The sixth essay's value lies in bringing Maṇḍal's largely forgotten oeuvre to notice and recognizing the artistic limitations of idealistic tragic endings.

The value of these essays consequently lies not simply in the finality of their judgements but in their ability to generate debate. Prasad's sympathetic criticism, committed to the people, makes visible the common social ground of Maithili, Hindi, and Angika literature. Its latent possibilities will be more fully realized when the positions it advances are joined to sustained analysis of texts, forms, and linguistic history. Such a development would not deny praise; it would enrich praise with concrete literary evidence and artistic discrimination.

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Part 09

Nit Naval: Ramdev Prasad Mandal 'Jhāṛūdār'

Gītāñjali Jhāṛū: The Broom Metaphor and Poetry Committed to the People

Ramdev Prasad Mandal 'Jhāṛūdār's' Gītāñjali Jhāṛū: Social Concerns, Lyric Technique, and Literary Evaluation

Abstract

Gītāñjali Jhāṛū (2018) by Ramdev Prasad Mandal 'Jhāṛūdār' is a notable collection of Maithili poetry directed toward ordinary people. Its first section contains twenty-two songs and its second fourteen titled compositions called 'jhāṛū', or 'brooms'. The broom becomes meaningful on two planes—as the poet's chosen sobriquet and as a poetic instrument of social reform. Caste discrimination, hunger, the arrogance of wealth, the exercise of power, education, moral discrimination, and opposition to superstition constitute its principal concerns. Through close reading, stylistic analysis, and comparison with traditions of folk literature, this review shows how the poet turns an everyday object and familiar words into a language of public dissent. The songs' refrains, cadences of address, and sharp moral oppositions create communicative power, while the extension of didactic statements, limited variety of images, and moral simplification of social causes also mark artistic limitations. Descriptions such as 'Mithila's Bhikhari Thakur' and 'the first genuine people's poet' are assessed in relation to the work's demonstrable popular commitment; they are not treated as proof of an historically unverified priority.

Keywords: Ramdev Prasad Mandal 'Jhāṛūdār'; Gītāñjali Jhāṛū; Maithili poetry of the people; broom metaphor; lyric technique; social justice; vernacular language; opposition to superstition.

1. People's Poetry and Jhāṛūdār's Poetic World

Poetry addressed to the people speaks not from a distance but from within their lives. Yet 'the people' denotes more than a simple dialect or familiar subjects. One must also ask what forms the experiences of hunger, the dignity of labour, social humiliation, official injustice, and unequal rights take within the poetry. Ramdev Prasad Mandal's Gītāñjali Jhāṛū is remarkable in giving his moral dissent the unusual name 'jhāṛū'. The broom is an ordinary implement of the courtyard; the poems turn it into an emblem for removing the dirt within society. The title joins the cultural dignity of 'gītāñjali', an offering of songs, with the work-bound everyday existence of the broom.

In Maithili literary discussion Jhāṛūdār has been called 'Mithila's Bhikhari Thakur' and 'Maithili's first people's poet'. These descriptions appear in a Videha

introduction dated 15 December 2011, expressing both the perceived significance of his popular poetry and his aspiration toward a living connection with the people. Such epithets, however, should begin rather than conclude criticism. Whose suffering does he voice? What tunes, words, and arguments give shape to that pain? Do the songs end as moral precepts, or do they open new ways of seeing human circumstances? Answers require close examination of the works themselves.

The collection's special quality is its creative fearlessness. The poet subjects rulers, religion, wealth, gurus, knowledge, time, and humanity itself to scrutiny. His voice is often indignant but not uniformly negative: alongside opposition stand positive demands for education, coexistence, labour, practical action, and mutual regard. The book's creative character cannot be understood without grasping these two currents of dissent and reconstruction.

The broom as an instrument of collective moral resistance

2. Gītāñjali Jhāṛū: Publication, Arrangement, and Poetic Conception

The first edition of Gītāñjali Jhāṛū was published in 2018 by Pallavi Prakashan, Nirmali, Supaul (ISBN 978-93-87675-61-2). Its introduction assigns distinct creative identities to the 'songs' and the 'brooms'. The numbered songs of the first section converse with the conduct of daily life; the subject-based pieces of

the second directly interrogate social institutions and distortions of human behaviour. The arrangement suggests movement from personal moral instruction toward public criticism. 'Jhāṛū' becomes the central sign of the poet's language of social action.

According to the author's biography in the book, Ramdev Prasad Mandal 'Jhāṛūdār' was born on 13 July 1967 in the village of Rasuar in Supaul district. It records his passing the matriculation examination in 1984, earning a livelihood through farming and private teaching, and beginning to write in 2009. 'Hamrā Binu Jagat Sūnā Chai' and 'Gītāñjali Jhāṛū' are named as published works. This account supplies a literary context: the recurrent concerns with education, hunger, rural life, and livelihood help explain the range of his experience, although the poems cannot be reduced to their author's biography.

The contents arrange songs 1 through 22 in sequence. The second part contains fourteen titled pieces: 'Śāsak Sudhārak Mahā Jhāṛū', 'Hakār Jhāṛū', 'Abhivādan Jhāṛū', 'Nyāy Sudhārak Jhāṛū', 'Nindrāśan Jhāṛū', 'Paisā Sudhārak Jhāṛū', 'Jñān Sudhārak Jhāṛū', 'Samay Sudhārak Jhāṛū', 'Bhūl Sudhārak Jhāṛū', 'Dharma Sudhārak Jhāṛū', 'Guru Sudhārak Jhāṛū', 'Mānav Tantra Jhāṛū', 'Andha Viśvās Sudhārak Mahā Jhāṛū', and 'Bemanukhatā Sudhārak Jhāṛū'. This naming sequence maps the domains of social reform as the poet sees them; every composition seems to call a specific practice or institution to account.

The collection may be examined on three related levels: first, the relations among rhythm, address, repetition, symbol, and subject; second, the critical force of its ethical propositions about caste, class, religion, government, and knowledge; and third, its relation to traditions of folk communication and literature engaged with the people. Richard Bauman's account of verbal art reminds us that a singable utterance is not merely an arrangement of words but also an act of social address. Jhāṛūdār's recurrent phrases and implied responses suggest the possibility of collective recitation.

An important difference emerges between the book's two parts. The songs often begin with experience, entreaty, and accessible ethical formulas; the titled 'broom' poems expand into reformative commands directed at whole social dispositions. Their difference is not merely one of length. The scope of address widens from individual to family, from family to society, and from society to a criticism of power. The question is how often this movement achieves poetic concentration and how often it grows diffuse through extended instruction.

3. Songs and Brooms: Two Voices of the Work

A particularly striking feature of the first part is the internal division between 'jhāṛū—' and 'gīt—'. Some songs begin with a brief proclamation, followed by fuller stanzas that develop its social import. Song 1 declares the principle 'live and let live', affirming human interdependence and coexistence. Song 2 links self-respect to opposition to humiliation. The doubled structure creates movement between opening and expansion, statement and restatement, exhortation and

explanation. A possible form of public address appears before the reader in which a pronounced principle could return as communal assent.

The range of subjects is evident in songs 6–7, 9, and 20. The benefits of education, schooling for deprived children, unemployment, and human want converge. Song 9 sets the 'hunger' of poor and rich in an inverted comparison: riches become not simply property but a figure of insatiable craving. In Song 20, the recurring formula concerning 'the poor innocent's day' voices a prolonged experience of breadlessness and deprivation. The songs' concise vocabulary thus expresses more than instruction; it is concerned with concrete divisions within life.

In the second part, the impulse to reform society receives explicit names. People are set against rulers, justice against injustice, wealth against greed, religion against caste pride, knowledge against ignorance, and the value of time against idleness. Such opposing pairs organize the collection's meaning. The reiterated adjective 'reforming' shows that the poet imagines poetry as a labour of social repair. The everyday action of sweeping becomes a metaphor for public discrimination and judgement.

The sequence also has an aesthetic effect. Readers encounter one independently named difficulty after another, while underlying values—humanity, understanding, labour, justice, association, and coexistence—return repeatedly. The book acquires a common ethical outlook despite being a collection of distinct subjects. Yet that unity also creates a poetic risk: if every question is answered by the same form of wholesome advice, the distinctive social history of each problem may disappear.

4. The Broom Metaphor: Labour, Resistance, and Social Cleaning

A broom is the ordinary instrument that removes dirt from a house or courtyard. The poet's achievement is to fashion it not as decorative symbolism but as a working implement of criticism. Dirt in Jhāṛūdār's world is not merely dust; it comprises arrogance, untouchability, greed, deception, irreligion, and unequal treatment. Sweeping signifies an intervention against moral passivity. The object's relation to labour keeps the poem on the ground, while the seeming unliterariness of the word 'broom' lends the utterance an abrasive edge. Its democratic force inheres in its familiarity.

In 'Nyāy Sudhārak Jhāṛū', justice is more than the formal business of a court: it becomes a question of human discernment and equality. The opening verse invokes 'dharma' and the protection of justice, followed by an appeal against faults such as lust, anger, pride, and greed. The poet connects institutional justice to the qualifications of the ethical individual. Its strength lies in the recognition that ordinary people already know injustice from experience, and the poem gives that knowledge a public voice. Yet material inequalities in legal process are more complex than the vocabulary of moral faults: this remains a limitation of the discourse.

'Śāsak Sudhārak Mahā Jhāṛū' begins with the collective cry 'Jai Hind'. After this address to the nation, the poet asks what makes an ideal ruler. The opening verse invokes love for the people, public policy, unity, and a 'game of the art of rule', judging political power against the standard of public welfare. Authority does not make itself great; the ruler must be judged by conduct toward the people. A vernacular oral cadence lends the statement feeling. Accessible moral language, rather than formal political theory, gives it its public edge.

At some points the metaphor of 'cleaning' reduces social contradictions to a division between proper and improper conduct. To confront systemic injustice, for instance, a 'good mind' alone is insufficient: economic opportunity, institutional bias, and historical discrimination must also be understood. Acknowledging this boundary does not belittle the poet's symbol. Jhāṛūdār dares to express complicated ideas through a familiar implement, and that courage is a memorable mark of his work.

5. Caste, Religion, and Equal Humanity

5.1 The Caste Order and the Ethical Ground of Equality

The opening of 'Dharma Sudhārak Jhāṛū'—"पैघ नहि कियो जाति लऽ कऽ / पैघ नहि कोनो धर्मसँ" ('No one becomes great by caste / nor is anyone great by religion')—attracts attention through its clarity and moral courage. Repetition of 'not great' rejects claims of social superiority one by one. Instead of prestige conferred by caste or religion, the poet makes humanity and action the basis of worth. He does not conceal the proposition behind imagery; its plain statement becomes a poetic act of resistance.

Opposition to caste arrogance is the humanist centre of the work, but that centre has two levels. One is the unqualified declaration of human equality; the other the analysis of caste-based social rights, land, livelihood, and historical deprivation. Jhāṛūdār's verse is sharper at the first level and more compressed at the second. It is therefore an important example of public exhortation for social justice, not an extensive sociological account of caste structure.

5.2 Religious Reform, the Guru, and Reason

'Andha Viśvās Sudhārak Mahā Jhāṛū' brings religious and social conventions before the bar of questioning. Ignorance, hypocrisy, and unthinking imitation are its leading targets. Especially significant is the way the argument against superstition moves beyond conventional religious instruction toward the importance of testing, reflection, and experience. Some of the diction is sharp and contentious, but the principal demand is that human beings enjoy the right to use their own judgement.

The coexistence of 'Guru Sudhārak Jhāṛū' with the poems against superstition is important. A guru may be a guide to knowledge, whereas superstition pushes people toward unquestioning surrender. The distinction reveals a subtle feature

of Jhāṛūdār's ethical world: he does not seek to abandon tradition altogether, but to evaluate it. Nevertheless, tensions between devotion and reason do not always find a clearly articulated resolution; for criticism these tensions are living questions within the work.

6. Hunger, Money, and Class Inequality

Song 9's lines "गरीब भूखल कम रहै छै /भूखल बेसी रहै धनवान" ('The poor are less hungry / the rich are hungrier still') create a cutting paradox. The 'hunger' that torments a poor person's body takes on a second meaning as the rich person's endlessly increasing desire. Instead of simile or extended description, the double sense of a single word discloses the ethical irony of class inequality. The successful satire lies in this shift of meaning, compelling readers to rethink 'hunger' itself.

The opening cry of 'Paisā Sudhārak Jhāṛū'—"पैसा पैसा हाय पैसा" ('Money, money, alas, money')—plays simultaneously upon sound and sense. Reiteration makes the frenzy of greed audible; a subsequent line calls money the 'snare of life'. Wealth becomes no mere object but a power that envelops people. Pressure exerted by money on family, debts, relations, and social standing gives the verse wider significance. The poet's attack is directed at uncontrollable acquisitiveness, while this moral idiom cannot fully disclose the more complicated structures of economic injustice.

The recurring phrase about the 'poor innocent's day' in Song 20 gives deprivation an extended duration. Starvation and anxiety over livelihood are not isolated incidents but an affliction repeating daily, and the song's recurrence makes that continuity perceptible. The writer's sympathy is not simply an appeal for charity: it prompts listeners to ask how burdens have been distributed among lives. The irony of Song 9 and the pity of Song 20 enrich one another's meanings.

Nevertheless, class questions often conclude with an instruction to relinquish greed. The moral blow is necessary, but questions concerning the worth of labour, inequalities of production, insecure employment, and the distribution of property require another kind of analysis. Acknowledging the distinction need not diminish the collection's social feeling; it helps clarify the economic possibilities latent in the poet's commitment to the people.

7. Education, Knowledge, and Time: The Affirmative Language of Change

In Song 6, education is the means of dispelling the darkness of ignorance. Song 7 relates children's schooling to their families, future lives, and employment. Jhāṛūdār's educational vision concerns not simply scholarly prestige but ordinary people's social opportunities and improved daily practices. Here poetry becomes an instrument of construction as well as a broom of negation. Opposition to

social discrimination gains force when accompanied by a demand that knowledge be accessible to all.

'Jñān Sudhārak Jhāṛū' links knowledge to self-understanding, alertness, and human conduct. The poet treats ignorance as more than an absence of information: it is a source of misjudgement and moral darkness. The merit of this enlargement is that education moves beyond the schoolhouse to become a question of public reason. Yet several senses of 'knowledge'—book learning, experience, moral awareness, spiritual discipline—appear together in some verses without clear distinction. Emotional energy exceeds the precision of conceptual definition.

'Samay Sudhārak Jhāṛū' begins, "संग समयक चलनाइ सीखू" ('Learn to keep pace with time'). Time is not an ineffable philosophical question here, but a field of personal responsibility in labour, vigilance, and opportunity. The importance of an instant, the loss incurred through pointless delay, and readiness to act are expressed in short statements. One can detect the poet's pedagogical inclination in this practical view of time, although a singable rhythm gives its easily grasped advice additional vitality.

Walter J. Ong's discussion of orality recalls the importance of recurring phrases, opposing pairs, and memorable formulas in stabilizing meanings in spoken communication. Jhāṛūdār's repeated stanzas can be read in this light. But it remains necessary to move beyond theory and attend to their particular beauty: when does recurrence become rhythm, and when does it merely add weight to an already expressed thought?

8. Rulers, Justice, and Public Accountability

Read together, 'Śāsak Sudhārak Mahā Jhāṛū', 'Nyāy Sudhārak Jhāṛū', and 'Bemanukhatā Sudhārak Jhāṛū' reveal the collection's concern with institutions. The people are the supreme criterion for rulers; discrimination and greed challenge justice; pride in power, selfishness, and deception are opposed in the poem on humanity. The poems' distinctive device is to translate structures of authority into accessible ethical questions. The people are not simply a crowd worthy of praise, but a community entitled to evaluate political conduct.

'Bemanukhatā Sudhārak Jhāṛū' brings together, in some passages, distortions of office, prestige, employment, borrowing, and social relationships. It laments the replacement of human trust with an exchange of private interests. The poet's 'humanity' is more than an abstract virtue: it is a social test of just treatment for the vulnerable, shared responsibility, and refusal of humiliation. Compassion and anger can consequently be heard together.

James C. Scott's account of resistance offers a way of considering language in the relationship between power and subordinate groups. Jhāṛūdār's indignation operates less through concealed mockery than through open social address. He criticizes power from within the idiom of moral conduct. These poems should

not be treated as direct substitutes for the history of any particular movement, but their literary worth as utterances of resistance is unmistakable.

9. Vernacular Language, Lyric Technique, and Poetic Limits

9.1 Refrain, Address, and Collective Voice

Jhāṛūdār's chief stylistic means are address, refrain, readily grasped oppositions, and concise ethical conclusions. Cries such as 'paisā paisā hāy paisā', 'Jai Hind', and 'sādhuvād' are not merely sentences: they create circles of sound in the listener's mind. In many songs the mark '–2' following a line functions as an instruction to repeat it in singing. The text invites one to imagine hearing as well as reading. This partnership of sound and sense is the collection's power as song.

The use of questions and paired oppositions provides further resources. Poor/rich, learned/ignorant, ruler/people, religion/action, wealth/humanity: these contrasts prepare the ground for immediate moral decisions. The poet dispenses with extended explanation to create a recognizable opposition, and the reader grasps its point. Not every social difficulty, however, can be contained within a binary. The effectiveness of this style lies in its compression, its limitation in simplification.

9.2 Closeness to Speech and Linguistic Mixture

The book's language gathers words from two worlds: the household and the public assembly. The coexistence of terms such as 'chai', 'bābū', 'māe–bāp', 'nokrī', 'kursī', 'paisā', 'mānav', and 'samay' shows the poet moving among village speech, common Hindi, and Sanskrit-derived ethical vocabulary. This mixture carries both the ease of rural conversation and the energetic pitch of reformist oratory. A desire to reach readers quickly is more prominent than devotion to classical linguistic purity.

Where this open combination of words supports rhythm and sense, it is productive; in other lines the syntax can sound less natural. Under the impetus of instruction, imagistic skill, inward experience, and layered meaning are not uniformly developed. These disparities should not be treated as the failure of a vernacular aesthetic. Accessibility to ordinary people is a poetic quality in its own right, to be evaluated in terms of both concentration and communication.

9.3 Poetic Strength and Poetic Limitation

The strongest moments occur when a short line opens a new perspective. The opposition between the 'hungers' of rich and poor, the sweeping away of injustice with a broom, and the appeal to move with time all uncover deep contradictions through one or two commonplace words. In some extended passages, by contrast, reiterated injunctions interrupt poetic exploration. Although repetition is a quality of folk song, every recurrence should have an artistic purpose.

Measured against this criterion, Jhāṛūdār's verse displays considerable possibilities alongside an uneven execution of them.

10. 'Mithila's Bhikhari Thakur': What a Popular Comparison Means

Bhikhari Thakur's Bhojpuri folk-theatre tradition involves dance, song, performance, dialogue among characters, and the pain of migration in 'Bidesiyā'. The principal voice of Jhāṛūdār's Gītāñjali Jhāṛū is lyrical, declarative, and reformist. Both writers place problems of ordinary life before society, but their expressive media differ. Thakur's dramatic work depends on the conflict of several characters; Jhāṛūdār's poetry foregrounds the poet's direct address. Comparison is therefore fruitful on grounds of social concern, ease of language, and public consciousness, not because the two genres are identical.

Badri Narayan's Bidesiya: Lok Sanskriti Evam Visthapan is an important point of reference for understanding the relations among folk theatre, migration, and social memory. In this perspective, Bhikhari Thakur turns the pain of separation into dramatic conversation, whereas Jhāṛūdār turns social humiliation and ethical disorder into lyrical proclamation. In both traditions vernacular language bears popular memory, but this does not imply equality of historical influence.

Studies of folk theatre by scholars such as Pankaj Kumar and Amod Kumar Rai emphasize the special character of Bhikhari Thakur's world of performance. Calling Jhāṛūdār 'Mithila's Bhikhari Thakur' signals a comparable aspiration toward popular singing and direct address. His independent contribution should nevertheless remain visible: the use of an everyday domestic implement as a metaphor for institutional injustice and ordinary people's ethical struggle is his own poetic signature.

The proper outcome of the comparison is not to declare sameness but to define difference precisely. Bhikhari Thakur gives social relations dramatic embodiment in folk theatre; Jhāṛūdār conducts direct ethical argument with the same society through verse. The former's theatrical polyphony and the latter's singable moral insistence demand evaluation according to their respective artistic forms.

11. 'The First Genuine People's Poet': Epithet and Literary History

'First' is a chronological claim and 'genuine' an evaluative one; they should not be conflated. Determining Maithili's first people's poet would require a prolonged historical comparison of popular songs, writings by labourers, folk theatre, social verse, and other written and unwritten currents of poetry. Jhāṛūdār's work unmistakably takes the side of ordinary lives: dignity for the humiliated, hunger, the right to education, and a critical view of rulers provide its social ground. These specific achievements can be judged independently without burdening them with an assertion of chronological primacy.

The introduction published in 2011 shows that this epithet circulated in the literary public sphere before the collection appeared in 2018. Yet an honorific label or introductory claim cannot replace broad comparative evidence from literary history. Respectful criticism properly emphasizes the actual strength of the written verse: Jhāṛūdār's voice reduces social distance, fashions accessible statements against inequality, and gives ordinary people's experience dignity as a poetic subject.

12. Internal Tensions and Critical Questions

The unity of Gītāñjali Jhāṛū is not a failing, but its inner tensions must be recognized. The poet opposes caste and religious hierarchies while endorsing trust in the guru; denounces greed while drawing affecting pictures of social poverty; judges rulers by public welfare while also invoking patriotism. The coexistence of these positions reflects the complexity of popular life. The critical question is simply which statements penetrate the depth of social relationships and which stop at the level of advice on good conduct.

'Mānav Tantra Jhāṛū' emphasizes relations among the body, the senses, and human consciousness. Its immediate succession by 'Andha Viśvās Sudhārak Mahā Jhāṛū' is thematically meaningful. While awakening the capacity for thought within a person, the poet strikes at social orthodoxy. The sequence builds a creative bridge from sensation to judgement and from judgement to social conduct. Its method belongs not to a scientific treatise but to a vernacular moral consciousness, and it should be interpreted accordingly.

Relationships among family members, parents, children, and society occupy ample space in the collection. By contrast, an independent expression of women's experiences, unequal domestic labour, and the complexities of patriarchal oppression are less fully developed. A careful judgement is needed: limited thematic extension is not the same as hostility toward women, but it is a significant absence for a modern criticism of literature aligned with the people. The question arises of when a general declaration of 'humanity' includes the experiences of particular injured groups and when those experiences dissolve into a generalized name.

The poet's popular address is effective in its singable form. Yet the poetic character of that address, its actual constituency, and its social consequences are three separate subjects. Gītāñjali Jhāṛū offers strong evidence of the first; studying the second and third would benefit from independent cultural history and research into folk singing. Keeping the distinction clear prevents exaggeration of titles or popularity and makes the work's literary value more readily visible.

13. Place and Value in Modern Maithili Poetry of the People

The collection's literary contribution is apparent at three related levels. First, the different structures of 'song' and 'broom' constitute a single poetic world. Second, transforming a labouring object into an extensive metaphor against

injustice shows the poet's originality in naming. Third, questions of caste, hunger, wealth, education, and government are voiced in direct, accessible, singable Maithili. Verse is therefore not shut away in a chamber of private feeling: its reading becomes a public test of social conduct.

Its artistic limits are equally clear. At several points, hastily drawn moral conclusions, reiterated images, inconsistent linguistic mixtures, and the reduction of social complexity to ethical binaries diminish aesthetic force. Conversely, verses that briefly capture contradictions within experience remain memorable. Fair criticism does not declare every line equal in excellence: it identifies both the radiance of the finest passages and the weakness of less accomplished ones without evasion.

Jhāṛūdār matters to contemporary Maithili poetry especially where questions arise about the distance between literary language and ordinary speech. He places the ethical dimension of social experience at the centre of poetic work. The collection's concentration, variety of form, and historical reach remain open to further study, but Gītāñjali Jhāṛū already stands as an important instance of defiant, people-oriented song.

14. Conclusion

The distinction of Gītāñjali Jhāṛū lies not only in its choice of subjects but in the fearlessness of its address. Poetry rises as a broom against injustice, the intoxication of wealth, caste pride, and superstition, while also constructing affirmative ground in education, knowledge, time, work, and coexistence. The rhythmic urgency of twenty-two songs and the thematic reach of fourteen ‘broom’ compositions are two aspects of one popular ethical world. The writing becomes particularly powerful as poetry when the poet captures a contradiction in everyday life through a brief, incisive phrase.

The epithet ‘Mithila's Bhikhari Thakur’ is a useful comparison for understanding Jhāṛūdār's aspiration to popular reach; it should not be mistaken for identical achievement in genre or historically established precedence. His literary value lies in his own verse: the labouring metaphor of the broom, accessible language, a sense of justice, and an unremitting demand for social reform. On these grounds Gītāñjali Jhāṛū merits a substantial place in discussions of Maithili poetry engaged with the people. Its criticism must combine appreciation with scrutiny of aesthetic form.

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Hamrā Binu Jagat Sunnā Chai: The Poetic Language of Folk Life and People's Consciousness

A Literary-Critical Study of Folk-Life Poetics, the Formal Distinctiveness of the 'Jhāṛū', and Maithili People's Consciousness

Abstract

Ramdev Prasad Mandal 'Jhāṛūdār's' Hamrā Binu Jagat Sunnā Chai (2012) is a collection of Maithili poems and songs animated by an aspiration towards social transformation. Its centre is not simply a lament over the suffering of ordinary people, but a voice of resistance to injustice addressing those people directly. The conjunction of a short verse-form called the 'jhāṛū' and the often song-like expansion that follows it constitutes the poet's distinctive formal design. The collection brings dowry, women's subjection, divisions of caste and religion, hunger, agriculture, administrative corruption, superstition and environmental crisis into relation with ethical questions. By examining the recurrence of refrains, metaphorical construction, popular address, the edge of satire, concrete images of social experience and a humanity-centred speaking voice, this study identifies both the creative achievements and the limitations of the book. Particular attention is due to the coexistence of declarations of women's freedom with conventional ideals, the critique of religious practice with the renewed use of religious analogies, and the tension between the enthusiasm for disseminating science and the temptation to simplify. Appellations such as 'the Bhikhari Thakur of Maithili' and 'the first people's poet' are considered in relation to Jhāṛūdār's popular orientation and Maithili literary historiography. Ultimately, the collection's distinctiveness lies in its resolve to 'sweep away' social evils, its direct conversation with the people, and its conception of collective ethical action through song.

Keywords: Ramdev Prasad Mandal; Jhāṛūdār; Hamrā Binu Jagat Sunnā Chai; people-oriented Maithili poetry; jhāṛū; popular address; women's voice; social satire; literary history.

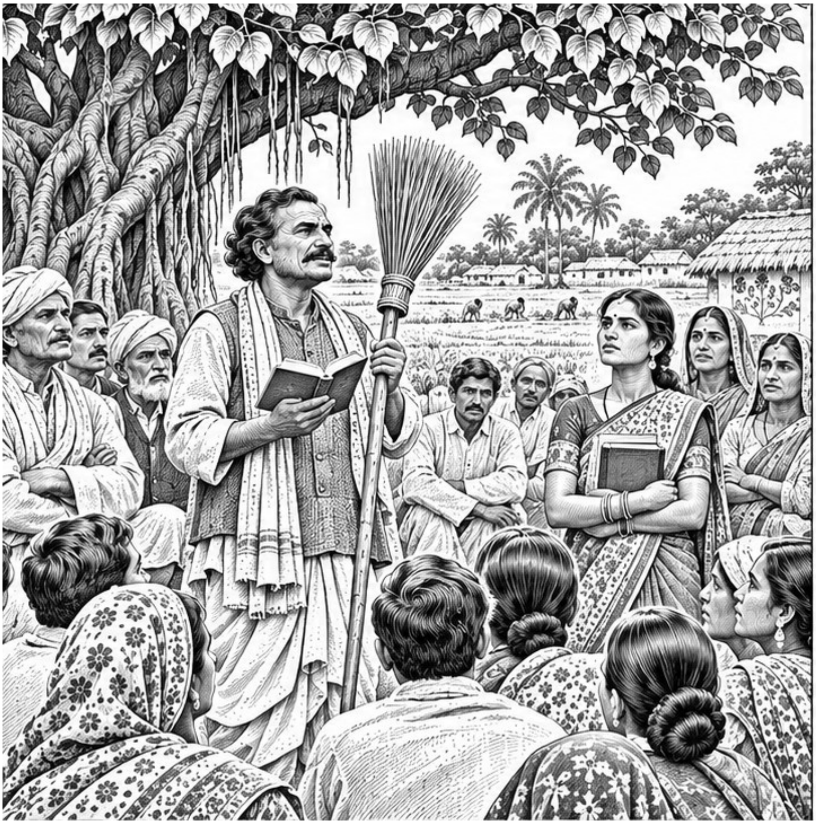
1. The Direct Relationship between People's Lives and Poetry

The rich tradition of Maithili literature, from Vidyāpati's lyric corpus to modern verse, contains diverse currents of feeling, experience and artistic form. Ramdev Prasad Mandal 'Jhāṛūdār' makes his own path within this tradition from the routines of everyday life and the direct social struggles of ordinary people. The crossroads of the village, the ridges around cultivated fields, the threshold of the panchayat, the cost of marriage, women's vulnerability and the devaluation of labour are not external subjects for his poetry; they are the circumstances that impel its creation. The poet does not treat his reader as an onlooker observing from a distance. He calls out to that reader as 'bābū', 'bhaiyā' or 'bahiniyā',

rebukes wrongdoing and urges resistance to injustice. This direct address provides the most substantial basis of his claim to be a people's poet.

The poetic journey of Hamrā Binu Jagat Sunnā Chai begins with 'Prayer', 'Flag Song' and 'Our Country'. Thereafter, brief 'jhāṛū' verses alternate with songs; in the latter part, longer verse-groups appear, including 'Humanity', 'Knowledge', 'Action', 'The Rāmāyaṇa', 'The Great Jhāṛū of Renunciation', and 'The Great Jhāṛū for Police Reform'. The opening prayer asks for the emergence of right thought within oneself, whereas the songs issue a vigorous call to change society. This sequence establishes a creative movement from self-cultivation towards communal responsibility. It is a principal key to understanding the interrelation of the book's subjects, forms and ideas.

The poet repeatedly proclaims the worth of truth, knowledge, service and humanity, yet his poetry is not founded on ideal pronouncements alone. At times he shows the fissures in an unirrigated field; at others, he interrogates the present through the mythic image of Janaka and Sītā oppressed by dowry. Consequently, criticism must operate on two levels: the social values upheld by the poet, and the degree to which the poems succeed in giving those values artistic embodiment. To acknowledge the importance of popular commitment while identifying uneven craftsmanship, excessive reiteration of instruction and contradictions within certain assumptions is indispensable to such an assessment.



The broom as an emblem of public poetry and ethical resistance

2. The Collection's Architecture and Opening Voice

Published by Shruti Prakashan, New Delhi, in 2012, the collection is dedicated 'To the Memory of Mother'. An introductory essay by Gajendra Thakur discloses the writer's identity and explicates the 'jhāṛū' metaphor. In the author's 'Inspiration' are the values inherited from his parents; in 'Purpose', the desire for peace and concord in every household; in 'Cooperation', the companionship of relatives and friends; and in 'Guru', the conception of acquiring knowledge from a succession of teachers, beginning with the mother and extending to the world. In these initial statements the poet represents his work not as a display of personal celebrity but as an extension of responsibility towards society. This dual disposition of reverence and dissent shapes the entire book.

Three major phases may be discerned in the collection's construction. In the first, 'Prayer', 'Flag Song' and 'Our Country' establish a culturally grounded language of exhortation. The second alternates short 'jhāṛū' verses with fuller songs organised by subject: the brief verse names a social defect, and the song exposes its human consequences. In the third, 'Jhāṛū—Humanity', 'Jhāṛū—

Knowledge', 'Jhāṛū—Action', 'Jhāṛū—The Rāmāyaṇa', 'The Great Jhāṛū of Renunciation' and 'The Great Jhāṛū for Police Reform' take the form of extended, ordered sequences. This gradual alteration of poetic experience within a single collection reveals a deliberate architecture.

The first brief 'jhāṛū' often offers an immediate judgment; the following song begins something like a public debate through the vocatives 'yau', 'gai', 'hau' and 'rau'. In the final extended 'jhāṛū', both registers converge in an expansive sequence of instructional verse. Thus speech, proverb, song and moral narrative circulate dynamically through the collection. The effect is intense when the poet grasps a concrete situation; it diminishes comparatively when the poem merely enumerates abstract virtues.

3. The 'Jhāṛū': From Everyday Implement to Social Metaphor

Gajendra Thakur's introduction explains the 'jhāṛū' through the domestic and agricultural implements used for sweeping. The broom used to clear a verandah differs in practice from the implement employed to remove dirt from fields and threshing grounds. The poet turns this practical distinction into a poetics: the grime of social vice will not simply disappear; it requires a forceful blow. The pen-name 'Jhāṛūdār' is accordingly not merely a humorous identity but a pledge to take up the pen against the evils of the age. The introduction's discussion of a 'new form' marks this experiment; its originality appears especially in the conjunction of the 'jhāṛū' and the 'song' within the collection.

The early 'jhāṛū' usually takes the shape of a condensed moral judgment or social satire in two long lines. In the criticism of dowry, for example, the marriage bond is represented by a 'woodworm' that eats it from within; in the section on the environment, forests, lakes, rivers, forest-dwellers and plateaux become parts of a single ecology of protection. The form is aphoristic, but is not merely proverbial: its meaning remains open through the relation between the situation addressed and the ensuing song.

"सभसँ भारी दहेज बेमारी, परिणय सूत्रक ई छी घुन।
रोबै छै सभ बेरा-बेरी, बहा-बहा आँसूमे खून।।"

"Dowry is the gravest affliction, the worm that eats the marriage bond;
All weep, each in turn, their tears flowing as though mingled with blood."

In this couplet on dowry, the 'woodworm' is a metaphor for a parasite that destroys the institution of marriage from within. By joining social disease to emotional lament, the poet compresses the mechanism of oppression and the sufferer's experience into a brief utterance. The song immediately following introduces the terrifying image 'dowry has become a shroud'; the first statement diagnoses a malady, while the second transforms that diagnosis into public indignation. Without this two-tiered structure, the distinctive operation of the 'jhāṛū' remains inadequately understood.

The 'jhāṛū' acquires literary distinctiveness not only through its designation but through what it does. In roughly two lines it gives sharp identification to a fault, bringing together the memorability of the proverb, the blow of satire and the immediacy of moral judgment. The subsequent song turns the pronouncement into a public conversation through direct address, example and recurrence. The long 'mahājhāṛū' extends the same process into a sustained sequence. To dismiss the form simply as a *dohā* or ordinary didactic verse would obscure its particular arrangement; nevertheless, innovation in poetic form and a claim to absolute historical priority are not the same thing.

4. Song, 'Jhāṛū', and the Craft of Creating an Audience

The orientation of these songs towards listeners is one of their significant artistic strengths. Interjections of address such as 'yau', 'hau', 'gai' and 'rau'; intimate vocatives such as 'bābū', 'bhaiyā' and 'bahiniyā'; and imperatives such as 'wake', 'become', 'plant' and 'look' bring the poetic voice among the people. A village, its collective meeting-place, its disagreements, questions and possible answers take shape before the reader. The song's refrain is not simply verbal repetition but a basis of communal memory: returning again and again, an idea becomes a shared utterance rather than an individual's statement.

In the song beginning 'Humanity kills humanity', the poet invites thoughtful members of society to sit together and reflect. The image of turning 'the pen into Rāma's bow and arrow' makes poetry not an advocate of violence but a weapon of ethical struggle against injustice. Another song, striking at the self-interest of leaders and officials and the divisions among ordinary people, understands unity not as a pious wish but as a difficult exercise in self-criticism. Here poetry transforms complaint into responsibility: the fault lies with those in power, but the people too must emerge from their fear, greed and factionalism.

The repeatedly invoked pairs—truth and falsehood, knowledge and ignorance, greed and service, peace and violence, humanity and inhumanity—readily identify the poet's social vision. Their simplicity makes the songs memorable, but excessive dependence on these binaries can confine social complexity to the two compartments of virtue and vice. The poems become strongest when an unirrigated field, a woman's torn sari, a corrupt panchayat or the shroud of dowry appears in place of abstract instruction. Such imagery gives experiential credibility to the poet's moral indignation.

5. The Title Verse: 'I' Is Spoken by Humanity, Not by the Poet as an Individual

Understanding the collection's title requires attention to its actual textual position. The sixth stanza of 'Jhāṛū—Humanity' contains the expressions 'Before me there was neither rule nor government' and 'Without me the world is desolate'. The surrounding stanzas make 'Humanity' proclaim its universal law, equality beyond caste and religion, and ethical existence within every human

being. It would therefore be a mistake of close reading to interpret the 'I' as a direct, egotistical statement by the poet Ramdev Prasad Mandal. In this sequence Humanity itself assumes the first-person voice: through personification, an abstract ethical principle becomes a public self-declaration.

"हमरासँ पहिले कोनो नै शासन, नै छै कोनो धर्मक विधान।
हमरा बिनु जगत सुन्ना छै, हटैबला छै पशु समान।।"

"Before me there was no government, nor even the law of religion;
Without me the world lies desolate; whoever casts me off is like a beast."

The ethical universality of 'Humanity' is sufficient to establish the philosophical range of this statement. The introduction proposes a connection with Buddhist emptiness and Advaita philosophy; nevertheless, the mere phonetic resemblance of 'sunnā' to philosophical 'śūnyatā' cannot establish that connection. The particular argument of dependent origination associated with Buddhist emptiness and Advaita's doctrine of the relation between Brahman and Ātman are not systematically developed in this sequence. The comparison is therefore a possible interpretative suggestion, not a demonstrated relationship of philosophical derivation.

One notable feature of the 'Humanity' sequence is its insistence upon the right to reason rather than merely to accept claims of truth. One stanza calls for questioned assertions to be accepted only after 'applying reason'. In this sense 'Humanity' is not just a feeling of compassion but an aspiration towards an ethical order open to examination. Yet the same sequence also employs 'hell', 'the father of religion' and images resembling religious salvation. The poet's rationalism is thus not constructed in a religionless void but reworked within an inherited religious vocabulary.

6. The Question of Women: From Objects of Pity to Independent Speakers

In a song on the lives of women in Mithila, women are described as 'subject to others'. Torn saris, a male-dominated village, silently endured oppression and the effective control of a woman's political chair by men all signify distributions of power, not merely domestic hardship. The lines 'Even if a woman becomes a leader / a man controls her chair' identify the division between political representation and the authority to decide. The poet locates the problem not in women's character but in the social structures of male privilege.

The song 'We Women of Mithila' raises a counter-voice against such helplessness. Its 'we' is the position from which women speak for themselves; the declared programme includes education, defending rights, breaking the chains of servitude and solidarity among women. 'We shall make a new path ourselves' is particularly significant: emancipation is conceived not as waiting for an

external saviour, but as self-initiated action. Instead of addressing women from outside, the poet lets women address society in their own voice.

"हम मिथिलानी मिथिला के नारी, रहबै नै कमजोर यौ।
नव डगर अपनेसँ गढ़बै, धरबै शिक्षा के डोर यौ।"

"We are Maithil women, women of Mithila; we shall not remain weak.
We shall forge a new path ourselves and grasp the guiding thread of education."

It would nevertheless be careless to treat this progressive voice as the necessary conclusion of the collection's entire conception of gender. In 'Our Country' every woman is presented ideally as Pārvatī and every man as Maheśa; later episodes in 'Jhāṛū—The Rāmāyaṇa' also endorse the ideal of wifely fidelity. The imagined educated and independent woman and the discipline of religious and domestic ideals therefore coexist in the same poetic universe. Rather than conceal this inconsistency, one should understand it as an incomplete yet important tension within social transformation.

Dowry is represented in two ways: through the mythic family anguish of Janaka and Sītā, and through an economic disease destroying the marriage rite. Both make visible the economic coercion of caste-bound, patriarchal marriage. The book, however, does not develop an extensive discussion of girls' property rights, alternatives to marriage, or the institutional valuation of domestic labour. This is a textual limit of its reformist songs, which must be acknowledged before attributing to them a complete philosophy of women's emancipation.

7. Caste, Religion, Communal Relationships, and Multilingual Mithila

A song devoted to communal harmony imagines Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians as flowers on the same tree, and urges the overcoming of barriers of caste and religion. In 'Our Country', Allah, Jesus and Gaṇeśa are invoked together within the ethics of hospitality. Rather than a prose declaration of secularism, this is an inclusion through images drawn from popular religiosity: distinct religious symbols inhabit one domestic and social experience. Here the poet's Maithili follows the linguistic logic of a mixed lifeworld rather than an abstract principle of linguistic 'purity'.

Recent research into literary history sharpens the historical significance of this inclusion. Ufāq Paikar's study of 2026 highlights Maithili *marsiyā* and the contributions of singers and audiences across castes and religions; it brings to light, in particular, non-elite vernacular voices in nineteenth-century collections. Jhāṛūdār's inclusive voice is undoubtedly valuable, but it cannot be said to have opened a literary space in Maithili to diverse religious communities for the first time. Rather, it is a modern reiteration of an already existing, polyphonic history.

The linguistic force of the discussion of caste lies in such injunctions as 'forget high and low', 'consider everyone a friend', and the demand that human dignity be determined by action. Nevertheless, separate analysis of the institutional organisation of caste oppression, land relations, representation and historical movements remains limited. Criticism must therefore distinguish the ethical maxim of interreligious harmony from concrete political struggles for social justice. A declaration of moral equality is necessary, but insufficient.

8. Labour, Hunger, Agriculture, and the Rural Economy

The exhortation 'How do people live here? Go and look from close at hand' turns literature's indirect sympathy into direct observation. Images of empty stomachs, unclothed bodies, homelessness and humble foods such as *kodo* and *maruā* render social inequality visible. Some songs construe poverty as the result of moral failure, but here its material relationships of oppression also emerge. The reference to an exploited person battered by feudalism is an unmistakable structural indication.

The poet's observation is more concrete in the passages on agriculture. A song proposes photographing unirrigated fields, the lack of water and electricity, cracked earth and ruined houses, and showing the pictures in the capital. The camera becomes a literary instrument of evidence-gathering and accountability: visual proof is to be presented of what a distant government fails to see. Mithila's predicament is no longer 'merely moral decline', but a question of public investment and administrative neglect.

One song connects cattle dung with soil fertility, household fuel and resource management; a song on tree planting urges the cultivation of five trees each year. Criticisms of unemployment, inactivity, block administration, the village head, panchayats and the trading of votes run alongside these themes. Yet exhortations such as 'work to abolish poverty' occasionally blur structural factors such as landlessness, the market, agricultural risk and administrative policy. The book's strength is the density of lived experience; its limitation is the insufficient development of economic chains of causation.

9. Government, Democracy, Citizenship, and Political Satire

Public office, the dignity of service to the people and the morality of voting recur throughout the collection. Political songs address the plunder carried out by leaders and officials, panchayat justice, bribery, vote-selling, preferential judgments in village councils and the opposition between officials' comfort and the people's hunger. The poet's political criticism begins with denunciations of personal corruption and extends to institutional injustice. Rather than abstract concepts of Parliament and the Legislative Assembly, the local panchayat, the Circle Officer and the Block Development Officer are its immediate signs of power.

The songs concerning Nitish Kumar introduce an important tension. In one, the poet plans to show the state's supreme leadership unirrigated fields; in another, he expresses hopeful expectations about roads, land consolidation, electricity and judicial reform. If not a contradiction, this is at least a double mode of addressing contemporary authority: government is questioned and also looked to with hope. Without precise dates of composition these voices cannot be claimed either as evidence that policies succeeded or as proof of a chronological political conversion.

In a song on civic responsibility, the 'seven duties' become a memorable ethical formula. The poet connects respect for the Constitution, national unity, the dignity of women, renunciation of violence and environmental protection to the conduct of ordinary listeners. The literary purpose is not a comprehensive exposition of the constitutional code but a concise lyrical transformation of collective duty. Here the difficult idea of citizenship becomes an utterance one can remember and sing. Even while distinguishing the legally prescribed list from literary selection, the popular educational force of the song is evident.

Political satire is striking for the intensity of its images of bodies and food: the rulers eat 'ghee and delicacies', while the people depend on dry bread. Through this image, a moral accusation about economic distribution becomes readily graspable in song. By contrast, the patriotic song invokes lofty images of the national flag and Indian ideals. The poet does not reject the nation; he tests the nation's ethical promises against administrative practice. Patriotism and criticism of power therefore coexist, generating an inner dynamism in this poetry of the people.

10. The Environment, Forest-Dwellers, and the Popular Language of Science

The environment is not decorative nature description in this book. Pollution of land, water, air and sound; vehicle exhaust; the lives of future generations; the degradation of the Ganges; forests, lakes, rivers and forest-dwellers; tree planting, shade, medicinal uses, soil protection and the danger of deforestation —all form a sustained field of concern. Particularly noteworthy is the conjunction of forest-dwellers' existence with forest conservation. Nevertheless, separate social questions concerning forest-dwellers' rights, displacement and forest governance are not examined in detail.

In 'Jhāṛū—Knowledge', scientific subjects—air, nitrogen, the earth, elements, planets and stars—are rendered in Maithili verse for a general audience. The experiment's distinctive quality is its desire to bring knowledge beyond the closed classroom. Yet popularising knowledge requires the distinction between simplicity and factual accuracy to be maintained. It is not scientifically correct to assign the entire extent of the atmosphere a height of 'eighteen kilometres'; such simplification weakens the poems' pedagogical purpose. Thus, however valuable

an example of the poet's enthusiasm, the information in the 'Knowledge' section is not beyond critical questioning.

In 'The Great Jhāṛū for Police Reform', each letter of the word POLICE supplies a description of the conduct expected of the police. Courtesy, public welfare, investigation, justice and upright behaviour combine to create a memorable ethical image of the profession. This is not an etymology of the actual word, but the poet's invention of a mnemonic for moral instruction. Its linguistic play succeeds not by explaining legal terminology but by questioning police conduct; at the close of the collection, the attack on the relationship between police and the ordinary poor citizen gives this invention a critical edge.

11. Action, Religion, the Rāmāyaṇa, and an Ethics of Practice

In 'Jhāṛū—Action' the author questions the usefulness of preaching, saying that the holy men have delivered many sermons and it is now time to hear the message of action. Knowledge and action are complementary: happiness is made possible not by conceptual knowledge alone, but by the practice of good deeds. The stanzas on action and fate in earlier songs converse with popular fatalism; the injunction 'Bābū, write your fate with the pen of action' seeks to bring destiny under active human agency.

In 'Jhāṛū—The Rāmāyaṇa', the epic becomes not only a revered text but a public ethical narrative meant to transform conduct. The poet criticises ritual worship and meaningless recitation: merely hearing the narrative is insufficient; its codes of conduct and actions must be emulated. Yet the depiction of women characters in this group also shows a return to the conventional ideal of the devoted wife. The rereading of the Rāmāyaṇa is therefore not a fully alternative philosophy of religion, but a meeting point between reformist and tradition-minded tendencies.

'The Great Jhāṛū of Renunciation' presents the surrender of ego, greed and wrongful action as ethical liberation. Verses on religious conduct sharply question temples and mosques, image worship and commerce conducted in religion's name. The poet criticises these institutions by invoking the principles of compassion, service and truth already operative within religious traditions. His engagement with religion is consequently no more aptly described as 'complete atheism' than as uncomplicated orthodoxy. It attempts to make the public good the decisive test of religious legitimacy.

12. 'The Great Jhāṛū for Police Reform': Poetry's Counter-Question to Administrative Conduct

In the concluding section, the poet asks that policing be understood not as a synonym for fear or the authority to punish, but through courtesy, lawful conduct, commitment to justice and sensitivity towards the public. Assigning a meaning to each letter is a memorable device of popular instruction in verse. Significantly, the poet not only articulates an ideal of reform but also opposes

collusion between police and criminals and the oppression of poor people. The poem is therefore not a simple eulogy to the 'ideal police'; it becomes an ethical examination of law and order from the people's perspective.

The reason to distinguish this section from an ordinary 'jhāṛū' or long song is its structural seriality: one institutional practice is divided, in sequence, into several ethical components. Length alone, however, is not an adequate test of the prefix 'great'. The great 'jhāṛū' on renunciation and that on police reform belong to the same family of titles but differ in thematic range, argumentative movement and intended audience. The poet thus keeps the subgenre flexible, at once an experimental strength and a limit to rigid generic definition.

13. Linguistic Practice: Maithili, Mixed Vocabulary, and Poetic Rhythm

The poetry's language is its principal means of remaining close to popular life. Maithili forms such as 'chai', 'hoitai', 'kakarā', 'kenā', 'jā̃', 'taē̃' and 'sabh' are heard alongside words drawn from Hindi, Sanskrit, English and administrative usage. 'Condition', 'camera', 'fund', 'court', 'C.O.' and 'B.D.O.' name modern technologies and structures of power that have entered village life. In this layered vocabulary, Maithili poetic language engages with actual spoken life. The experiment demonstrates the capacity to raise questions of government, science, social justice and the environment in the people's own speech.

The return of refrains, resemblances of final sound, short imperatives and often precisely directed vocatives create an audible rhythm. Recurring signals such as 'our ...', 'new ...' and 'therefore ...' leave room for collective repetition within the text. The ordered reappearance of 'yau' and 'gai' gives the verse an identity of voice as well as meaning. Its lyrical energy lies in this aural organisation, although an anxiety to maintain rhyme occasionally produces unnatural phrasing. It is more appropriate to describe the work as a form on the border between singable folk poetry and didactic verse.

End-rhyme is sometimes effortless and sometimes loosens the density of meaning in order to preserve itself. 'Truth', 'knowledge', 'service', 'humanity' and 'devotion' recur insistently under the pressure of instructional repetition. They are most effective when joined to material particulars: fissures in fields, a woman's torn sari, an engine emitting smoke or a poor person's dry bread. Where the poem is only a sequence of abstract terms, its effect becomes rhetorical rather than philosophical. A critical assessment of the collection must acknowledge this unevenness.

14. 'The Bhikhari Thakur of Maithili': The Possibilities and Limits of Comparison

Read in its literary context, the first similarity suggested by the appellation 'the Bhikhari Thakur of Maithili' is direct conversation with ordinary people.

Bhikhari Thakur of Bhojpuri made women's suffering, social conventions, migration and familial disintegration into public experiences through drama and song. Jhāṛūdār raises questions of dowry, ignorance, corruption, labour and women's rights through songs and 'jhāṛū'. In both cases language is not an aesthetic exercise removed from the people, but the medium of their anguish and aspirations. The analogy is meaningful in this sympathetic sense.

It should not, however, be taken as generic identity. Drama, character, dialogue, acting and the collective visual experience of spectators are central to Bhikhari Thakur's creative world; brief moral blows, singable direct address and serial 'mahājhāṛū' predominate in Jhāṛūdār's collection. In one, dramatic characters live through their circumstances; in the other, the song's speaking voice directly calls upon its listeners to change. Respecting this difference converts the appellation from mere praise into a literary comparison.

The courage of social self-criticism is an important affinity between their popular orientations. The relationships between home and the outside world are unfolded through plot in the theatrical tradition of *Bidesiyā*; in Jhāṛūdār's songs, 'all', 'you' and 'we' construct relationships of communal responsibility. Jhāṛūdār's poetic force lies in the collective voice of song; Bhikhari Thakur's in the conflict embodied by theatrical situations. 'The Bhikhari Thakur of Maithili' thus names a broad affinity of public address, not a judgment of historical or artistic sameness.

15. 'The First People's Poet' and the History of Maithili Literature of the People

At the beginning of the book, Ramdev Prasad Mandal is called 'Maithili's first people's poet'. The actual meaning of 'people's poet' involves more than being first in print: it includes sensitivity to the people's experience, the capacity to express feeling in popular language, and public intervention against injustice. In that sense Jhāṛūdār's writing establishes its own popular identity. The word 'first', however, opens a different historical question. No chronological judgment is possible without a broad history of earlier Maithili folk poetry, labouring communities, oral composition and neglected printed literature. Distinguishing these questions does not diminish the importance of the poet's real achievement.

Pranav Prakash's study of 2026 mentions Brij Bihari Lal Mandal's Mithila Nāṭak, published in 1901, which discloses a different Maithili tradition of social criticism. Brij Bihari Lal Mandal and Ramdev Prasad Mandal are distinct authors; the differences between their works and periods must remain clear. Such research reminds us that the history of Maithili literature oriented towards the people consists of many voices and genres. Jhāṛūdār matters within this diverse tradition by virtue of his particular poetic form and social consciousness.

Ufāq Paikar's research gives Maithili *marsiyā* literature and the voices of different social groups a place in literary history; Lalit Kumar's study draws attention to the caste complexities of Maithili print culture and the

establishment of linguistic prestige. These contexts enlarge the meaning of 'the people': the question is not simply whether poor people are mentioned as subjects, but who speaks in literature, who listens, in which language and from what social position. Jhāṛūdār's 'jhāṛū' is a poetic intervention in which ordinary people themselves are addressed as participants in social judgment.

'Maithili's first people's poet' therefore clarifies the poet's people-oriented image as an honorific, but firmer historical evidence is needed to establish chronological precedence. This critical distinction does not lessen respect for Jhāṛūdār; it assigns greater weight to what is genuinely distinctive in his poetry. The collection develops a notable form of popular writing through the social metaphor of the 'jhāṛū', the pairing of brief stanza and song, continual address in the language of ordinary people, and long verse sequences on knowledge, action and humanity.

16. Image, Satire, and Rhythm: Testing Jhāṛūdār's Poetic Strength

Jhāṛūdār's imagery centres on useful everyday objects and the people's experience. The 'woodworm' signifies the decay worked by dowry from within; the 'shroud' its deadly violence; the 'torn sari' visually embodies women's subjection; fissures in an unirrigated field are the mute language of absent development. These images are effective because they connect distant intellectual arguments with the tactile texture of ordinary life. The poetry is naturally moving where it presents a concrete image; it loses affective depth when it simply lists moral virtues.

In satire, the poet frequently prefers the counter-question to straightforward condemnation. His criticisms of leaders and officials, panchayats, those who conduct business in religion's name and corrupt public servants are direct thrusts of vernacular speech. Sometimes he reverses an everyday relation: public servants feed themselves instead of serving the public; religious paths entangle people in commerce instead of teaching compassion. Such inversions produce less laughter than an uncomfortable summons to self-examination. Nevertheless, the abundance of moral accusations in place of developed portraits of characters, events and situations occasionally renders the satire monotonous.

Rather than count metrical units formally, the poet trusts address, rhyme, recurrence and the memorability of short lines. The return of 'yau' is an audible relationship with the people; 'gai' creates a voice of intimate conversation with a community of women; 'rau' sometimes suggests affectionate discipline. These utterances have the potential for song, although not every piece achieves the same rhythmic polish. Jhāṛūdār's achievement is not rigorous adherence to classical prosodic prescriptions, but an attempt to make poetry an event of renewed public address.

17. Contradictions within the Poetry of Social Transformation

Jhāṛūdār's poetry is not a uniform system of thought. The humility of 'Prayer' and the rebuke of the 'jhāṛū'; the national pride of 'Flag Song' and fearless

criticism of the panchayat; women's self-determination and the domestic code of the Rāmāyaṇa; advocacy of scientific knowledge and reliance on religious symbols—all coexist in the poetic world and complicate it. These divergences ought not simply to be rejected as defects. They are also the internal conflicts of a society searching for a language of change without entirely abandoning tradition. The poetry is nevertheless most successful where reformist speech rises above generic instruction to become the image of a concrete popular condition or experience.

A second major contradiction concerns the relationship between individual virtue and institutional reform. The poet asks corrupt individuals to mend their ways, yet also raises material questions of unirrigated fields, public funds, police abuse and unjust panchayats. Faith in moral improvement and the criticism of systems thus stimulate one another. Critically, the collection's distinctiveness is most clearly revealed when such abstract ideals as 'truth' and 'service' acquire concrete political meanings in hunger, labour, women's rights and the administration of justice.

18. Overall Literary Evaluation and Conclusion

Hamrā Binu Jagat Sunnā Chai matters for its direct assault upon the social maladies of its age. The poet figures dowry as a woodworm lodged within marriage, women's dependency through the image of a torn sari, poverty through empty stomachs and meals of *kodo* and *maruā*, and the fissures in fields as evidence to be brought before government. In such passages, ordinary experience becomes poetry. The implement called the 'jhāṛū' unites the poet's ideas, language and social role: song becomes a resolve to 'sweep' society clean.

There are limitations alongside these achievements. Excessive repetition of ethical injunctions sometimes brings verse close to oratory; examples of 'knowledge' and 'science' are occasionally offered without adequate complexity; women's autonomy and the ideal of the dutiful wife uneasily inhabit the same poetic world. Criticism of government and optimistic praise of development also call each other into question. Yet these tensions make the collection a living social document: the status quo and change, tradition and critical questioning, reverence and resistance travel together in these poems.

Honorifics such as 'the Bhikhari Thakur of Maithili' and 'the first people's poet' are valuable for understanding the poet's wide-ranging commitment to the people, but his creative worth need not depend upon such titles. Comparison with Bhikhari Thakur ought to acknowledge the generic difference between song and drama; the historical question of 'firstness' should be viewed through Maithili's various traditions of writing for and by the people. Jhāṛūdār's achievement in his own poetic field is clear: he gives the people's language, direct exhortation and the art of social self-criticism a recognisable poetic form.

On the whole, the collection's value lies in its art as a vehicle of people's consciousness. Its strongest songs regard the people not as passive objects of

compassion but as active participants in change; at their best, the satires not only enumerate faults but fashion images of their social consequences. Jhāṛūdār is important to Maithili criticism because his work challenges the criteria of literary prestige themselves. Is poetry only a private pursuit of beauty, or must it also be measured as a public art that enables society to see its familiar injustices with new eyes? Hamrā Binu Jagat Sunnā Chai offers a distinctive and disputatious answer to that question.

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Part 10

Nit Naval: Anand Kumar Jha

An independent bibliography is provided at the end of each critical study.

Chapter 01 • First publication of the play: 2000

Ṭākāk Mol: The Economics of Dowry, Women's Identity, and the Ethical Conflict of Maithili Theatre

An Extended Critical Study of Anand Kumar Jha's Play

Abstract

Anand Kumar Jha's Ṭākāk Mol is a social play organised around the dominance of money in the marriage system of modern Maithili society, the commercialisation of dowry, rural poverty, patriarchal conceptions of prestige and resistance by a younger generation. Money here ceases to be merely a medium of exchange and becomes an illegitimate measure of a girl's abilities, love, family honour and ethical judgment. The compulsion of Garib Jha, Prabhā's self-respect, Prabhākar's loving intervention, Samar's ethical resistance, Līlādhar Bābū's obsession with prestige and Dalāl Kākā's self-interested activity together produce a theatrical conflict in which the language of financial transaction overwhelms that of social relationships. An examination of the three-act sequence, evidence of the play's early staging, its colloquial dialogues, the participation of a crowd and its final collective decision makes clear the playwright's primary intention to awaken popular consciousness against dowry. Yet the achievement lies not only in a programmatic ideal, but also in the question of when the heroine's refusal, the groom's repentance and collective acceptance reinforce, and when they constrain, one another. This study reads the play jointly through social realism, the sociology of the economy, feminist dramatic criticism and theatrical performance. It examines both the effective scenes and the limitations of didactic dialogue, abrupt conversion and facile resolution.

Keywords: Maithili drama; Ṭākāk Mol; Anand Kumar Jha; dowry; marriage market; economic capital; women's identity; theatre; social realism; ethical resistance.

1. Introduction: The Question of 'Price' and the Play's Central Irony

The title Ṭākāk Mol is itself a question: what is the price of money? Ordinarily money is a measure of value, but when money itself must be assigned a price, the criteria of valuation in society are evidently shifting. The play embodies this

suggestion within the institution of marriage. When a daughter's education, personality and parents' affection, and the mutual love of a young man and woman, become secondary to the groom's family's financial expectations, money appears as the decisive social force. The playwright's irony is that a person who places an economic price upon an intimate relationship such as marriage becomes morally impoverished.

To dismiss the play merely as 'propaganda against dowry' would diminish its artistic conflict. There are, in fact, two parallel narrative lines: the girl's family's economic compulsion and social shame on the one hand; the younger generation's love, judgment and resistance on the other. The first discloses the constraints imposed by patriarchy; the second suggests the possibility of leaving them behind. Their collision creates the play's meaning. The question is not simply whether dowry should be given or received, but who is entitled to decide a marriage: wealthy guardians, intermediaries, village society, the young man, the young woman, or two people agreeing freely with each other.

The basis of this criticism is the play's own subject matter, dialogue, configuration of characters, arrangement of acts and scenes, and staging indications. In examining drama one must remember that a play, though a narrative text, is also a potential performance. The characters' utterances therefore require analysis alongside entrances and exits, offstage sounds, group presence, changes of lighting and the spectators' ethical involvement.

2. Bibliographical Description and Evidence of Theatrical History

Ṭākāk Mol is a play by Anand Kumar Jha, first published in 2000. The preliminary publishing details name Tara Kant Jha as publisher. The playwright's 'A Few Words' and Ganga Jha's 'Opinion' are not merely formal prefatory items, but two primary interpretations of the work's purpose. The playwright sees unemployment, corruption, dowry, social convention, illiteracy and the struggles of the younger generation as contemporary crises. Ganga Jha identifies the pricing of marriage and the social devaluation of daughters as central problems. It should be remembered that an author's stated purpose and the complex meanings generated by a work are not invariably identical; criticism must give each its proper place.

The preliminaries also supply evidence of the play's public theatrical life. It was first performed at Mehath by the 'Yuva Nāṭya Kalā Parishad, Mehath' on the occasion of the Pārthiva Śiva-pūjan festival. The staging record systematically names the author-director, performers, roles and other collaborators. Its list suggests the work's layered social range: poverty, brokerage, youthful love, parental prestige, priests, village residents and collective roles. At a minimum, the evidence establishes that the work was created not only for solitary reading but also to be heard and seen before a communal audience. Yet a record of one production cannot by itself establish lasting popularity, exceptional acting

success or a sustained performance tradition; such conclusions require independent theatrical evidence.

The relation between publication and performance is also significant. The play's social preoccupations belong to a period when educational opportunities and modern aspirations surrounding marriage were increasing, even as a prospective groom's educational attainment could itself raise his price in the marriage market. The drama translates that historical tension into the individual pain of its characters. It is thus more accurately read as an important historical dramatic text animated by the desire for anti-dowry social change than as a comprehensive theory of women's liberation.

3. The Three-Act Structure: From Private Anguish to Public Decision

The play's three acts establish the problem, expand the conflict and fashion a decisive public moment. The first introduces Garib Jha's household, anxiety over Prabhā's marriage, Sumitrā's domestic judgment, Guṇānand's sympathy and Jīveś's attempts to help. The impoverished father sees the consequences of his own unfulfilled life falling upon his daughter. This is not merely a difficulty over 'giving a daughter away' but a compound crisis involving land, income, reputation and social pressure. The mutual affection of Prabhā and Prabhākar is also indicated clearly in this act. From the outset, then, the play places the private world of love beside the social market in marriage.

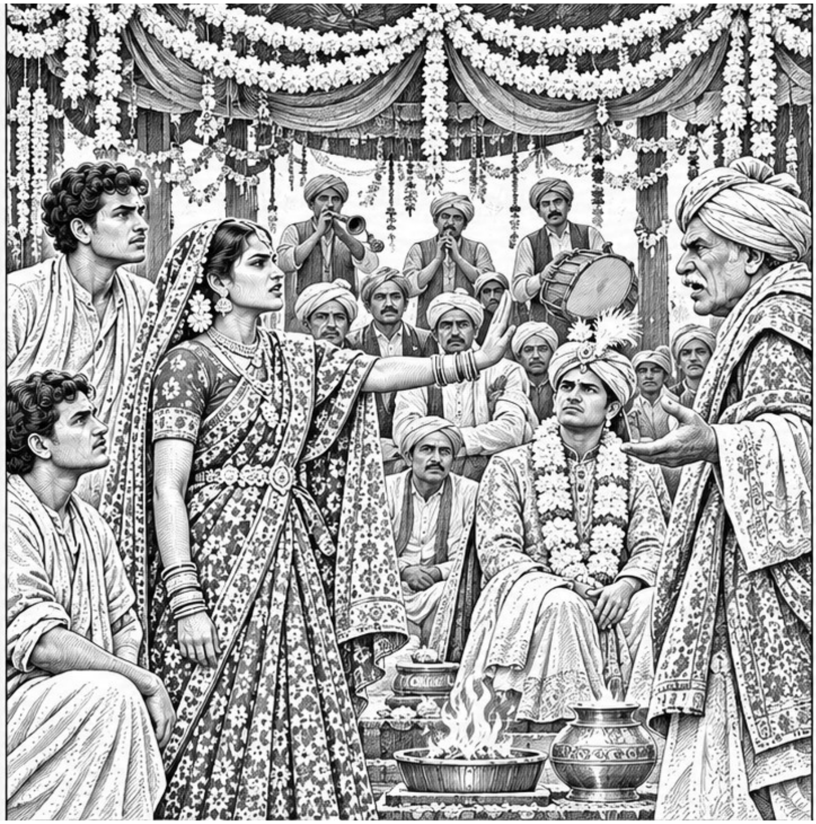
A second strand of the first act develops around Līlādhar Bābū's courtyard and residence and the activity of Dalāl Kākā. The groom's family's resources, the prestige of lineage and the broker's interests reinforce one another. Līlādhar displays the self-confidence of a man who believes wealth entitles him to pronounce upon social arrangements. The broker and his assistant travel from house to house, turning 'relationships' into transactions. In this sequence, the play apprehends social reality through comedy and irony.

In the second act, intimate dialogue between Prabhā and Prabhākar and the broker's increasingly insistent manoeuvres accelerate the action. Both lovers understand marriage as a sacred bond of mutual trust; the intermediary and the groom's elders treat it as a business of price-setting. The outward bustle of wedding preparations and the underlying financial pressure eventually appear together. Bargaining ceases to be merely an everyday turn of speech and becomes the principal cause advancing the plot.

In the third act, private domestic suffering becomes public humiliation and resistance. Food, the wedding procession, villagers, ritual observances and arrangements of prestige surround the marriage pavilion. When the demand for dowry is exposed in this festive moment, the mask of social display falls away. Prabhā declares her refusal; Samar distances himself from the groom's family's greed; Prabhākar becomes an agent of loving and ethical intervention; and the

assembled community is compelled to choose sides. The final scene transforms an individual union into a symbol of collective resolve.

This structural movement is effective because it begins inside a household and ends before society. Nevertheless, long explanatory speeches repeatedly slow the action. Dialogues reiterate signs of dramatic conflict already sufficiently established. Such repetition may be understood in relation to the audible demands of popular theatre and the tradition of didactic social drama, but it remains an artistic limitation.



The wedding pavilion as a site of public refusal

4. The Economic Sociology of 'Money': The Moral Encroachment of Exchange Value

The play's most important device is that money escapes the confines of an economic instrument and acquires the authority to measure human standing. The groom's family values education, but not as the basis of ethical human qualities; rather, it increases the price that may be commanded in the market.

This constitutes a perverse irony of modernity: modern schooling, instead of opposing the old convention of dowry, can become a means of raising its rate.

Garib Jha's problem is not only the absence of cash; more painful is the fear of social humiliation produced by that absence. The father's love for his daughter leads him to regard himself as inadequate. Society treats economic deprivation as a personal fault, and the poor family is crushed between self-respect and social acceptance. In this sense dowry is symbolic violence as well as direct exploitation: the demand for money generates shame, weakness and guilt in the impoverished person's mind.

Pierre Bourdieu's ideas concerning the relationships among economic, social and cultural capital provide a useful comparative criterion for the play's treatment of dowry. Economic capital appears as cash and gifts; social capital as lineage, a broker's connections and the acceptance of groups such as the panchayat; cultural capital as education and claims to a prestigious way of life. These forms together establish the girl's marriage 'price'. Yet this theory must not remain an extraneous vocabulary imposed upon the play; the central truth already emerges through its dialogues: learning, lineage and morality are readily converted into calculations of money.

The distinction between 'price' and 'value' is decisive. Price is a quantity in exchange; value is the ethical substance of human dignity and relationships. Disaster follows when the characters regard the two as equivalent. The meaning of the title is thus not confined to the last speech; it permeates every transaction, condition, consent, silence and act of resistance from beginning to end.

5. The Experience of Poverty: The Triangle of Garib Jha, Sumitrā, and Jīveś

The name 'Garib Jha' itself becomes a dramatic metaphor for social condition: his personal identity is inseparable from his economic destiny. Yet it would be wrong to see him only as a pitiable father. He does not cruelly treat his daughter as a burden; he wants her to study, live and marry with dignity, without becoming a victim of social exclusion. His weakness lies not in his moral character but in the disproportionate economic demands of his surroundings. The distinction takes the play beyond facile sympathy towards interrogation of an unjust system.

Sumitrā's role merits attention. She brings practical judgment to the conflict between the household's economic reality and the daughter's wishes. A woman's voice inside the home does not merely repeat the man's endless anxiety, but points to other priorities: the daughter's education, proper timing, the family's actual means and the limits of public pressure. Sumitrā is, in this sense, a gentle but important source of domestic resistance. That the later acts do not develop her role sufficiently is a limitation of the play's dramatic balance.

Jīveś appears as a hardworking, helpful character who carries social information. He connects events across locations. His voice evokes the reality of rural labour, the interdependence of families and the wider social world of a poor household. The play, however, does not fully use the possibility of releasing him from the convention of the 'comic assistant'. His own experiences and autonomous struggles are little explored.

The particular achievement of the scenes centred on Garib Jha's house is that dowry does not become an abstract reformist slogan. The crisis arises from material circumstances—livelihood, cultivation, limited resources, the daughter's future, social shame and the hope of assistance. Here the method of social realism works effectively.

6. Prabhā: Lover, Daughter, and Choosing Subject

Prabhā is among the play's most complex characters. At the beginning she expresses guilt at seeing her own birth as a misfortune for her father. This self-blame marks the grief patriarchy implants in a daughter's mind. The girl is not the cause of poverty, yet society makes her feel that her very existence places her in debt to her father. The play represents this psychological injury with sensitivity.

In Prabhā's conversations with Prabhākar, the right to love, self-determination and social fear coexist. She accepts love, but knows from experience that declaring it cannot by itself dissolve social prohibitions. She asks whether society will recognise their relationship. This is not weakness but a lucid grasp of social reality. The difference between the young man's assurances and the woman's doubts exposes gender inequality: the economic and social penalties of a failed relationship are more often borne by the woman.

At the moment of crisis in the wedding pavilion, Prabhā assumes the decisive voice of resistance. Humiliated by the demand for dowry, she refuses to be transferred like an object. This turn is the centre of the play's feminist possibility. Her objection is not merely that the offered price is too low; it challenges the notion that a daughter's personhood depends upon what her father can pay. The girl first tormented by a sense of being a burden publicly asserts her dignity at the end. In this transition she changes from an object of patriarchal compassion into an active ethical agent.

Yet this achievement raises a question of its own. Prabhā refuses a marriage, but the final resolution again centres on the acceptance of marriage. The play does not pause to consider the independent possibility that she might remain unmarried and determine the course of her education and life. The issue is not that her final consent is illegitimate; it is that the community's approved alternative of a 'proper' marriage comes to dominate the decisive moment. Her autonomy is both disclosed and enclosed within a collective moral settlement. This contradiction intensifies the work's critical interest.

7. Prabhākar's Ideal and Its Limits

Prabhākar is configured as a representative of the younger generation's consciousness. He regards love neither as physical attraction nor as a clandestine liaison, but as a foundation for mutual respect and equality in marriage. Prabhā's poor family is not a difficulty for him; the difficulty is the social mentality that rejects love and character on account of wealth. He thus constitutes an ethical counter-position to the dowry system.

Several exchanges between Prabhā and Prabhākar sound like romantic vows. He believes in love's omnipotence; she draws attention to the severity of social barriers. Both perceptions possess a partial truth. Their difference might have made the characters fully alive, and at first the play touches this possibility. Later, however, Prabhākar frequently becomes a vehicle of the playwright's explicit ideal pronouncements. A character preoccupied with delivering a message to society rather than wrestling with personal conflict risks becoming, in part, a spokesman.

Prabhākar's final self-criticism is particularly notable. In opposing social injustice, he admits the possibility that his own behaviour may also have wronged another, and expresses a forgiving disposition towards Samar. This broadens the ethical horizon: social reform is not the property of one hero, but a responsibility shared among several people. If forgiveness is represented too swiftly, however, it seems as though the immediate wound of injustice has already healed. Greater artistic depth would have required fuller articulation of the duration and consequences of that injury.

8. Samar: From Heir to Convention to Reasoning Young Man

Samar creates a crucial turn in the dramatic structure. Although he inhabits a social system in which the groom's monetary demands are regarded as normal, he has the courage to make a different ethical choice. Through him the play establishes a necessary distinction: the groom's family and the groom himself are not a single moral authority. A young man's dissent from parental pressure, the desire for prestige and dowry practices opens a possibility of change.

Samar's resistance redefines the relationship between education and humanity. His figure dramatises the ethical expectation that educational attainment should become a means of discerning injustice, not a price in the marriage market. He attempts to regain authority over the decision about his own marriage. Yet the speed of his inner transformation, the development of his argument and the responses of the families concerned show that the playwright rapidly pushes events towards resolution.

A comparison between Samar and Prabhākar is productive. Prabhākar moves towards change through fidelity in love; Samar changes his decision after witnessing injustice within the immediate marriage conflict. The former represents personal attachment; the latter, a conscience born of social position.

This distinction rescues the drama from being only propaganda for marriage by choice: even someone who did not initially participate in the love story may acquire the moral right to oppose dowry.

9. Līlādhar Bābū, Dalāl Kākā, and His Assistant: Three Faces of the Marriage Market

Līlādhar Bābū embodies the conjunction of wealth, family prestige and social dominance. His language of reputation is grounded not in human virtues but in display and economic comparison. In his mentality marriage ceases to be a personal relationship and becomes a ceremony for preserving the family's 'standing'. Through him the playwright shows the convergence of older pride in lineage with newer economic greed.

Dalāl Kākā is the most pointed satirical figure in this system. The broker's business is not simply to unite two parties for their mutual benefit; it is to convert their insecurities and desires into prices. Hence discussions of sums, transactional ingenuity, secret coordination, commission and the market vocabulary of the 'suitable match' recur. When the intermediary in a social relationship acquires a financial stake, mediation becomes an institution of exploitation in its own right. The assistant gives this institutional cunning a comic shape.

Dialogues between the broker and his assistant are an important means of audible theatrical entertainment. The tempo of ordinary speech, repetition, witty thrusts, excuses and enumerations of sums create stage comedy. Yet the comedy is not simply light relief: spectators recognise the deformities of their own society within the laughter. Satire thereby becomes the play's ethical weapon.

A limitation is that Līlādhar's and the broker's inner social anxieties and self-justifications are not unfolded with sufficient subtlety. The greedy characters remain primarily representatives of greed. Such characterisation is immediately legible on a popular stage, but the historical complexity of individuals and the several possible causes of economic ambition, communal competition and ethical conflict remain relatively indistinct. Substantive criticism must acknowledge this limit.

10. Social Prestige, Gender Inequality, and the Public Display of Marriage

Prestige in the play is not merely a desire of the mind but visible social capital. The wedding procession, entrance courtyard, meal, crowd, musicians, village decorations and priests together make marriage a public exhibition. In that exhibition, a condition concerning dowry leaves private conversation and becomes an issue of collective shame or glory. When economic greed continually

receives social legitimacy, opposition is difficult: a broken wedding threatens not only a relationship but also public standing.

The play's acute moment occurs when Prabhā objects to her economic devaluation. The inhuman calculation that would measure a girl as though she were merchandise fills her with anger. Her response reveals an unmistakable consciousness of women's identity and dignity. Her refusal raises questions about her family's economic arrangements. Comparative feminist drama studies may help here, but it would be mistaken to fit every woman character into a single template of modern autonomy. Prabhā's speech, Sumitrā's pragmatism and the relative silence of other women on stage need separate examination.

The crowd has a double role. At first, social shame, fear of lost prestige and anxiety about a broken wedding constrain family decisions; at the end, the same public presence exerts pressure towards reform. This is the play's most important ideological experiment. The gaze of society, formerly an instrument of oppression, may become a witness to justified resistance. Yet one should not suppose the collective consensus that finally emerges to be wholly free: public pressure can sometimes assist opposition to dowry and sometimes impose fresh control over individual choice.

11. Dramatic Language: Colloquial Speech, Satire, and Declaration

The linguistic basis of Ṭākāk Mol is colloquial Maithili. The characters create their world through familiar domestic forms of address, popular beliefs, everyday experiences, phrases of caste and social prestige, and immediate objections. Garib Jha's sorrowful register differs from Sumitrā's practical domestic judgment, the broker's bargaining and the lovers' emotional dialogue. These distinctions help an audience identify characters on stage.

English words occasionally enter the dialogue. When younger characters use ‘serious’, ‘relax’ or ‘promise’, their speech registers the urban-educated or modernising aspirations of the period. It would be wrong to exclude such mixing simply as linguistic corruption; language itself reveals a character's social aspirations, emotional habits and modes of self-presentation. Nevertheless, if these usages become fashionable affectations instead of suiting the character, they can damage the naturalness of the dialogue.

Humour and deception work together in Dalāl Kākā's speech. Spectators know the difference between what he says and what he intends; dramatic irony arises from that distance. By contrast, Prabhākar's speeches on social reform sometimes become direct expressions of the playwright's own convictions. At such moments, he appears less an independent agent than a mouthpiece for the author's programme. The language of the play therefore combines two tendencies: living vernacular conversation and goal-directed public oratory.

Linguistic beauty should not be measured by archaic vocabulary or poetic ornament alone. Social drama has its own beauty in spontaneous speech, half-

spoken sentences, silence, shame, helpless laughter, anger and collective declarations. By this criterion the work succeeds frequently. More rigorous editing, condensation of repeated ideas and preservation of each character's independent rhythm of speech might have sharpened its dramatic force.

12. Theatrical Craft: Stage Directions, Offstage Sound, and the Collective Stage

The text gives explicit divisions into acts and scenes, directions for locations, entrances and exits, changes in lighting, offstage sounds, folk songs, gatherings of women and the action of wedding rituals. Such signs provide the means of translating narrative into performance. The movement from the emotionally charged interior of the first home through Līlādhar's affluent setting to the final wedding pavilion visually embodies the structure of society. The pavilion in particular becomes a decisive 'public space' where the characters' relationships can no longer remain private.

Offstage sounds mark changes of time and atmosphere. Wedding songs, the clamour of guests, the sounds of cooking and the crowd construct the reality of festivity. Against this background the dispute over dowry becomes more piercing, since spectators simultaneously hear and see the opposition between celebration and an oppressive condition. The festival itself becomes the setting for satire.

The cast list and record of the first production indicate the author's awareness of collective staging. Historically, this theatrical form may be considered in conversation with Maithili folk-dance theatre and modern performance. The social proximity of folk performance, its humour, rapid collective responses and reliance upon the actor's voice are all relevant. There is nevertheless insufficient ground to classify the play wholly as folk-dance theatre, fully classical drama or modern experimental theatre. It is primarily a social, purpose-driven play made for a popular stage, showing some effects of folk performance.

The difficulties of actual staging are clear. Long idealistic speeches may halt the movement of a plot. The wedding crowd, numerous entrances, successive changes of location and emotional culmination at the pavilion demand disciplined direction. To adapt the work successfully for performance, actors and directors would have to attend closely to aural pauses within dialogue, brief scenic transitions and the balance of ensemble acting. This judgment follows from stage indications in the text; it is not a review of any specific later production.

13. Crisis in the Wedding Pavilion: From Private Violence to Collective Drama

The wedding pavilion is the play's climax. Here the demand for economic payment holds ritual time hostage. The groom's family's condition and the

bride's family's powerlessness show how a religious and social rite, if emptied of a sense of justice, may become a highly effective cover for violence. The bride's preparations are complete, the villagers assembled, and the family anxious to preserve its dignity; precisely then the question of human worth becomes most acute.

Prabhā's resistance reverses this structure. Until now the girl, although central to the ceremony, has largely been the subject of others' discussion; suddenly she becomes a person speaking her own position. She rejects not merely the broker's condition but the underlying logic of humiliation. Samar's objection marks a parallel change of conscience among the men. Prabhākar introduces the emotional force of love. The relation among these three voices prevents the climax from remaining simply an economic dispute.

Of particular importance is the final collective anger, which brings characters such as the broker and Līlādhar before the court of public opinion. The play seeks the possibility of justice within collective consciousness. Yet one cannot equate a crowd's quick mockery, pursuit, threat of punishment or the demand for an apology with justice as such. Lawful accountability, women's choice and collective anger must remain distinguishable. The play partly maintains these differences and partly obtains resolution through the crowd's sudden unanimity. Its democratic energy and ethical simplification emerge together.

14. Justice, Forgiveness, and Contradictions in the Final Decision

The ending presents justice on three levels: moral condemnation of brokerage, acknowledgment of the insult suffered by the girl's family, and the restoration of a relationship founded on mutual respect among the younger generation. Forgiveness serves as a way of rebuilding social bonds. Samar seeks Prabhākar's forgiveness, while Prabhākar examines his own earlier response. This is enough to prevent the play from becoming a narrative of vengeance alone: it expresses the desire to reconstruct relationships.

Forgiveness, however, requires critical scrutiny. The broker who lays the dowry trap, the guardians whose hunger for financial prestige creates the marriage crisis, and the society that initially remains silent do not abolish structural injustice simply by asking pardon. Social transformation requires more than a change of heart among wrongdoers; it calls for collective responsibility to prevent repetition of the practice. The play's final ethical appeal gestures in this direction, but provides little depiction of concrete institutional consequences.

Prabhā's refusal and subsequent accommodation form the central test. The plot desires the victory of love, but a critical reading asks: is a woman's independent 'no' given its full duration? Does it become necessary to convert her decision into a conclusion acceptable to her father, lover or society? Such questions do not reduce the play's achievement; they connect it more strongly with contemporary debates. For the moment of her refusal creates implications more far-reaching than the playwright's eventual resolution.

A social-reform drama often wants to send spectators home with an unambiguous conclusion; Ṭākāk Mol belongs to that tradition. Yet a measure of dramatic depth is how many questions remain alive. The strongest passages are those in which the girl, the young men and the impoverished father experience the same problem differently. The weaker passages are those in which diverse positions are eventually gathered into one voice.

15. Its Place in Maithili Drama: Continuity and Change in Opposition to Dowry

The unequal economics of marriage is an older concern within Maithili social criticism. In Harimohan Jha's Kanyādān, the demands of an educated groom and the bride's family's economic compulsion form an important basis of a satirical plot. Babu Saheb Chaudhary's Kuhes likewise provides a context of criticism of marital convention, gender injustice and unthinking social imitation. Ṭākāk Mol may be situated within the dramatic continuation of this larger concern. Such a comparison establishes neither direct influence nor a borrowed plot; it makes clear only a shared social problem.

Modern Maithili drama has repeatedly engaged rural life, poverty, unequal relationships and women's social position. Ṭākāk Mol is distinctive in making its basic problem unmistakable in the title and carrying the narrative from personal pain towards public dramatic resistance before a crowd. In this respect it offers a useful example at the intersection of entertaining popular theatre and purposive social drama.

The study of Maithili performance tradition teaches an important caution: a written play and the history of its actual productions must not be assumed identical. In relation to folk-dance theatre, Sudhip Kumar Jha's research draws attention to the limits of classifications between traditional, modern and folk performance. The warning is especially necessary in analysing the reformist history of modern Maithili dramatic texts.

Contemporary studies of Maithili's public prestige, its multilingual cultural setting and its dramatic literature reveal different historical dimensions. Christopher Diamond's consideration of Raghunandan Das's Mithilānāṭak shows drama to be not only a medium of story but also one of social and cultural self-representation. Yet no direct equivalence should be established between that earlier work's national-cultural purpose and Ṭākāk Mol's anti-dowry image of rural society; they belong to separate contexts of modern Maithili theatre.

A proper assessment of Ṭākāk Mol does not require declaring it an epoch-making, complete artistic revolution, nor should it be expelled from literature simply because it instructs. It belongs to a tradition of social theatre that invites ordinary spectators publicly to think, laugh, feel anger and make commitments against economic injustice in marriage.

16. The Combined Possibilities of Feminist and Class Readings

A feminist reading cannot be completed with the declaration that 'Prabhā is independent'. The authority of male families within patriarchal marriage, the poor father's compulsion, the social uses of education, the male intermediary's profit and the girl's public silence are all aspects of one structure. Prabhā's refusal creates a fissure in that structure. Yet if the play treats marriage for love as the necessary happy ending after her refusal, several other autonomous options for a woman may disappear from view. A feminist reading must therefore consider not only a woman's words but also the scope allowed to her decisions.

In a class reading, the bride's family's poverty is central, but the primary causes of economic inequality—landholding structures, insecure livelihoods, employment opportunities and debt traps—appear only to a limited extent. The playwright effectively depicts the personal consequences of dowry without fully analysing the structural economics of poverty. This limitation can cause the social problem to be reduced to a change of heart in the exploiter. A fuller unfolding of these economic and social relations within the characters would have given the resolution firmer foundations.

Bringing the two perspectives together reveals an important fact: Prabhā's humiliation arises neither solely from 'being a woman' nor solely from 'being poor'. Its violence is intensified by her combined condition as the daughter of an impoverished family. Society makes her personhood dependent upon what her father can pay. Her 'no' to this combined devaluation is the play's most contemporary ethical achievement.

17. Artistic Achievement and Creative Limitation: A Balanced Evaluation

The play's chief achievements lie in the clarity of its social question, the title's density of meaning, the growing public crisis from house to pavilion, the satire of brokerage, the young woman's resistance, the presence of a young man undergoing moral change, and the energy of collective theatre. The playwright understands the uses of performance: brief entrances, shifts of mood, occasional offstage effects, individualised vocal registers and the multi-character climax carry the work beyond the solitary experience of reading.

The limitations appear when the problem, having been established in its complexity, is resolved through a swiftly idealistic conclusion. More emphasis falls upon Līlādhar's and the broker's moral defects than upon the social causes of their self-interest. More developed dramatic action in place of Prabhākar's lengthy instruction could have deepened the effect. The independent consequences of Prabhā's refusal for her life receive little consideration. Samar's decisive transformation and the crowd's unanimous resistance sometimes occur at the speed of dramatic convenience.

Despite these limits, Ṭākāk Mol keeps its central question alive until the end: human dignity is not a commodity for sale. Social satire, the suffering of class and a woman's dissenting voice converge in this principle. To pose the question directly before an ordinary theatrical audience is itself a cultural intervention. The play's language has a clearly stated ethical direction; the critic's duty is both to acknowledge its importance and to examine its artistic means and contradictions with equal seriousness.

18. Conclusion

Ṭākāk Mol is a drama of its age's social pledge against dowry and of the desire to protect living human relationships. Its plot shows how, when economic power gains command over the language of marriage, poverty ceases to be merely material deprivation and becomes social shame, guilt and public humiliation. Against this cycle, the playwright places love, education, judgment and collective moral courage.

Prabhā's resistance is the work's most meaningful point. Reading her initial helplessness alongside her later refusal shows a girl changing from an object of society's pity into a person capable of asserting her rights. Samar's moral choice and Prabhākar's self-examination assist this transition. Yet the society's swift forgiveness and the resolution in a happy marriage leave open the question of how far society accepts the worth of an autonomous woman's refusal.

As literature, the play is notable for its socially realist subject, colloquial Maithili, satirical supporting characters, clear staging arrangement and transformation of the wedding pavilion into a space of public resistance. Its dependence on expository speeches, partial idealisation of characters and rapid resolution are aesthetic limitations. Its proper place in Maithili theatrical history must therefore be determined by acknowledging ethical and artistic duality. Ultimately, the greatest question posed by Ṭākāk Mol is not the price of money but the value of a society that has begun to weigh human beings in money.

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Chapter 02 • First publication of the play: 2001

The Inner Structure of *Kalah*: Economic Insecurity, Familial Authority, Women's Identity, and the Dramaturgy of Tragedy

An Extended Critical Study of Anand Kumar Jha's *Kalah*

Abstract

Anand Kumar Jha's *Kalah* links the disintegration of the family in modern Maithili society with unemployment, economic dependency, patriarchal authority, mistrust after marriage, conflicts over inheritance and intergenerational resentment. Developed in three acts, the play gives theatrical form to a social crisis that travels from a domestic courtyard through urban accommodation to a hospital. At first, the quarrels of Sumitrā and Ārtī, Ākāś's lack of income and the question of Sureśvar Bābū's familial authority appear separately; as events unfold, they become each other's causes and consequences. Dialogues between Rājīv and Komal raise tensions over property, labour, private letters, education and familial surveillance. In its culmination, an industrial accident, Ākāś's death and Ārtī's childbirth intensify the social tragedy. Through close reading, examination of dialogue and character relationships, dramatic pacing, feminist questions, linguistic mixture and stage directions, this study argues that the play's achievement is its dramatisation of social and economic chains of causation; its limits lie in the didactic ending, somewhat one-dimensional character tendencies and the rapid accumulation of unforeseen events. With this duality in view, *Kalah* is read as a significant text within modern Maithili social drama.

Keywords: Maithili drama; social realism; family conflict; unemployment; women's identity; inheritance; dialogue; tragedy; theatre.

1. Introduction: From Quarrel to Social Structure

At first glance, the title *Kalah* suggests a verbal dispute within a household. The play, however, reveals that conflict is more than an exchange of bitter words. It names an arrangement in which one person earns money, another asserts authority, another demands service and still another is denied the chance to express a desire. Economic crisis lies at the root of domestic tension; mistrust makes that crisis more severe; rigid notions of propriety, masculinity and entitlement render mistrust violent. The drama's historical importance lies in its linking of these levels.

The introductory materials raise a particular social problem: youth unemployment, the expectations surrounding marriage and family, and the entry of constraint into personal life. The critic should not adopt the author's self-explanation as a final verdict, for the play's scenic structure frequently leaves questions more uncomfortable than its declared solution. Its stated purpose is to preserve the family; the performable narrative, however, asks whose voice is heard inside that family and whose suffering is treated as ordinary. Reconciliation must remain incomplete until those questions are answered.

The work's theatrical history is also important. The book records the date and place of its first production, organisers, actors and roles, and details of stage assistance. *Kalah* cannot therefore be treated as only a play for reading; it is the printed form of an already performed dramatic work. Evidence of actual performance provides relevant grounds for understanding the rapid rhythms of dialogue, the insistence on entrances and exits, and the emotionally charged climactic scene.

2. The Architecture of the Plot: Deepening Crisis across Three Acts

The first act begins with multiple signs of familial unrest. Sumitrā speaks of the burden of household work; Ārtī is hurt by humiliation and accusation in her marriage; questions of employment and responsibility beset Ākāś. Ordinary actions—playing the radio, moving through the home, arguing—introduce spectators to a recognisable domestic environment. Yet closer attention shows that, from the beginning, familiar exchanges contain mounting pressures of command, sarcasm and dissatisfaction.

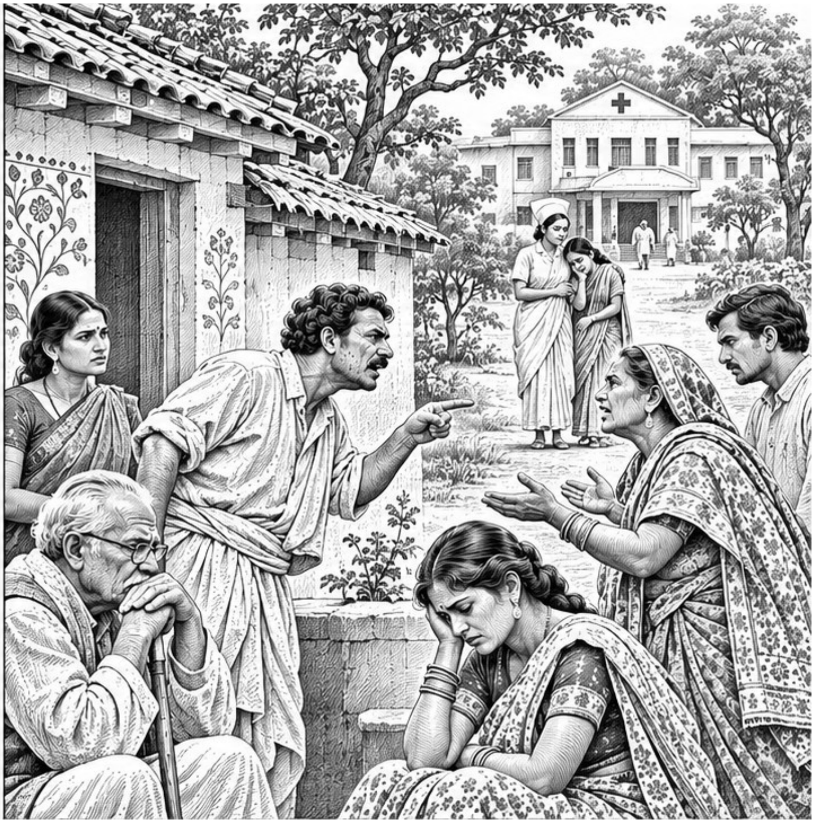
The second scene of the first act raises the marital relationship between Ākāś and Ārtī. Ākāś apologises and promises improvement; Ārtī's experience tells her that such words have been heard before without any alteration in conduct. The plot moves here from a momentary wrong towards the structure of repeated violence. The play does not determine the truth of the allegations as a court might; it asks how trust can be rebuilt amidst fear, suspicion and continuing humiliation.

With the arrival of Rājīv, Komal and Chunmun in the third scene, inheritance and rural–urban tension form a new centre. The arrival of a letter is not an inconsequential domestic incident but a test of relationships. The right to read personal correspondence, decisions about going to the village, claims to property, obligations towards parents and earning a livelihood away from home become dramatic pivots. More than a dispute between older and younger family members, the issue is where the family's collective authority ends and individual privacy begins.

The second act opens in Sureśvar Bābū's courtyard with an explicit dispute over filial duty. Luṭan Kākā gives voice to the anxieties of elders and to communal expectations. In the second scene, the family's tensions reach immediate physical aggression: treatment of Ārtī, property and threats of separating from the household collide in one scenic sequence. In the third scene, the decision to leave

the village and unresolved wounded pride sharpen the rupture in relationships. This linear arrangement drives the drama from argument towards crisis and from crisis towards disintegration.

In the third act, Ārtī and Ākāś's urban life discloses new forms of precarious shelter and material scarcity. Through Komal's suspicions and Rājīv's questions, the play again sounds the echo of earlier accusations. The final scene takes place in a government hospital. News of an explosion in a factory, the injured Ākāś, Ārtī's labour pains, their friend Yogeś's efforts and uncertainty about medical information converge. Ākāś's death, the birth of a child and Ārtī's psychological collapse transform the title into a tragic conclusion.



The domestic dispute and the hospital horizon of tragedy

3. Economic Insecurity and Unemployment: A Crisis of Masculinity or a Question of Labour Distribution?

Unemployment is not merely background in *Kalah*'s economic world. References to Ākāś's qualifications and lack of employment establish a livelihood crisis; his dependency in the ancestral home repeatedly calls the legitimacy of his

choices into question. With no income, society commands the young man simultaneously to be an obedient son, an independent husband and a successful man. Ākāś's unrest is created within this impossible triangle.

The play also shows that control over economic resources often becomes a claim to moral supremacy. In some dialogues household food, shares of property and family obligations appear as equivalents of one another. The transformation matters: affectionate relationships begin to speak the language of accounts and transactions. Within Ākāś's anger one can read both a defensive impulse and a tendency to conceal powerlessness through fury.

On the other side, the play raises women's unpaid labour through Sumitrā. She says that the continuous burden of work in the house and courtyard falls upon her. To isolate this expression from economic analysis would lose half the meaning. Work within the home and employment outside it both sustain a family, but recognition and authority are not shared equally. This inequality prepares the ground for daily quarrels.

Nevertheless, the play does not fully depict the larger institutional causes of unemployment: labour markets, education, migration, policy or workers' protection. The crisis is chiefly experienced within familial personalities. Consequently, although the text acquires a broader social resonance, it does not unfold its full potential for structural political criticism. The family is the dramatic centre; the economy outside it remains, for the most part, an indirect force.

4. Property, Inheritance, and Patriarchal Rule

Sureśvar Bābū cannot adequately be described simply as a harsh father. He also carries the family's memory, ownership of the house and an elderly father's fear of being left without support. In his speech, property becomes a question of moral discipline. Luṭan Kākā's intervention reinforces the traditional belief that a son's very existence is bound to paternal obligation. Ākāś objects that interpreting duty unilaterally, without corresponding rights, becomes injustice.

The language of paternal authority reveals a fundamental contradiction. Does giving a son life make a father the owner of all his future decisions? Does unemployment legitimise the son's humiliation? Conversely, does a son's declaration of independence release him entirely from caring for ageing parents? The play puts these necessary tensions into dialogue and sometimes proposes mutual tolerance as their answer, but the clash of arguments remains.

In Rājīv's story, economic assistance, private letters and familial disagreement reveal another aspect of conflict over property. Village land and urban possibilities regulate his conduct. Komal's perspective adds demands for privacy and self-respect within marriage. The question remains: on whose conditions is family 'unity' to be constructed? Violence can also occur when the individual aspirations of every member are erased in the name of the collective interest.

The relation between Ākāś and Rājīv matters because the play does not make brothers merely enemies. Despite concealed suspicions, rivalry and different experiences, moments arise when mutual protection or reconciliation seems possible. Such moments carry the work beyond one-dimensional instruction about family into an examination of relational complexity.

5. Women Characters: Resistance, Honour and Humiliation, and Constrained Autonomy

Sumitrā, Ārtī and Komal occupy three distinct positions as women within the drama. Sumitrā manages the household as a member of an older generation; her complaint concerns the unequal division of domestic labour. As a newly married woman, Ārtī passes through love, humiliation, insecurity of shelter and motherhood. Komal expresses her views on marital privacy, correspondence, economic rights and freedom to visit the village. These distinctions prevent the play from reducing 'woman' to a single undifferentiated voice.

Ārtī's dialogue contains a particular contradiction. She wants not only assurances of love from Ākāś but respect in practice. He apologises, but a cycle of repeated guilt and renewed assault emerges. Her dissent rejects the legitimacy of that cycle. Nevertheless, the narrative's final direction locates her life on a tragic axis defined by her husband's body, his death and motherhood. Her education, capacity for work and possibility of an independent existence arise even in the hospital scene, but are not given a full dramatic outcome in the form of self-reliance.

The relationship between Sumitrā and Komal is also not reducible to a simple opposition of victim and oppressor. Sumitrā mocks Ārtī, but is herself burdened by labour and insecurity. The ready impulse to call Komal selfish may obscure her demands for personal rights; on the other hand, her impulsiveness sometimes obstructs family conversation. Criticism needs to understand the characters' statements as situated speech rather than the playwright's final opinion.

In the hospital of the third act, a nurse hears Ārtī's life story and raises the issues of employment, education and self-reliance. This meeting introduces an alternative social imagination within the play: a woman's capacity for labour and civic existence beyond the conventional enclosure of husband and child. That possibility does not decisively direct the narrative, however. The child's survival and the husband's death pull it back into a pathetic frame of motherhood. A feminist reading is more productive if it acknowledges this incompleteness, since resistance and tradition coexist in the same work.

6. Linguistic Levels: Dramatic Movement among Maithili, Hindi, and English

The dialogues are principally in Maithili, but the characters' social experiences also emerge through combinations with Hindi and English. 'Sorry', 'please', 'personal letter', 'problems', 'programme', 'support', 'report chart' and English phrases used in medical speech recur. This mixture is not simply a failure of linguistic purity; it is symbolic capital associated with university-educated youth, urban employment, hospitals and changing prestige.

In Ākāś and Ārtī's private dispute, an apology in English carries the manner of modern urban emotion, but the words do not guarantee any real change in the husband's behaviour. The distance between emotional language and actual relations of power is thereby exposed. In the conversation between Rājīv and Komal, the word 'personal' asserts a woman's claim to private rights; the familial system becomes uncertain about the boundary between private and collective authority.

The hospital scene is particularly notable linguistically. Formal medical information comes in a mixture of Hindi and English, while Ārtī's anguished response is spoken in the language of intimate relationships. Administrative speech in the hospital confronts personal grief as a hard, albeit necessary, fact. The difference in language is not merely stylistic; it establishes a distance between institution and human being.

Despite this diversity, English mixing occasionally becomes an expedient sign of social position rather than a psychologically subtle feature of individual characters. Careful treatment of intonation, silence and pauses in performance could make these exchanges highly effective; without it, some passages may sound declaratory.

7. Scenic Construction, Performability, and Dramatic Time

The stage directions trace definite changes of location: Ākāś's room, Rājīv's urban residence, Sureśvar Bābū's courtyard and finally the government hospital. Through these environments, the family's interior space, the ancestral domain and the public institution of the state become a single dramatic geography. Radio, bed, household effects and letters create a familiar domestic world in the first act; later, news of an accident, medical charts and an infant's cry make the dramatic setting extraordinary.

One effective stage action occurs when verbal indignation becomes a physical threat. The crisis is no longer only narrated; it becomes visible through the body. Another is the collective character of Ākāś's departure from the family: reactions of different generations, assurances, regret and silence share the stage in a single moment.

In the last act, the interweaving of news of industrial injury and two simultaneous medical crises heightens dramatic tension. Time rapidly condenses:

ordinary waiting, sudden news, the nurses' hurried activity, diagnosis and death. This condensation creates momentum, but for some spectators so many events arriving at once may turn emotional shock into pressure exerted by incidents rather than the result of organic dramatic development. Both effect and credibility must be tested in criticism.

The text offers the director sufficient clues for lighting, sound and ensemble acting; the record of the first staging shows that the play reached a public platform during a social festival. That record names male performers in women's roles. This may be treated as a historical fact about the production arrangements of that occasion; it would be improper to draw a universal conclusion about women's participation in Maithili theatre solely from it.

8. Compassion, Accident, and the Ethics of the Climax

The dramatic action of *Kalah* culminates in personal grief, but the chain of causes has been prepared from the outset: humiliation and economic weakness in the home, the decision to leave, the search for poorly paid work in the city, an industrial incident and death. This sequence carries the play beyond instruction about family into the sphere of class-related risk. To describe Ākāś's death simply as punishment for the family's failure of dialogue would oversimplify the text; his death also raises the question of hazardous working conditions and compulsion to earn a living.

A troubling ethical issue arises here. If the accident is treated merely as a consequence of domestic 'conflict', industrial workers' safety, constrained employment choices and public accountability disappear from view. The play reports an explosion at a factory but does not develop an institutional investigation or identify the chain of responsibility. Social criticism must mark this absence. Economic crisis and domestic bitterness are related, but it would be logically incoherent to assign every cause of an industrial accident to familial misconduct.

Placing Ārtī's labour and Ākāś's death together is an extraordinarily intense strategy of pathos. The extinction of one life and arrival of another put spectators at an unstable threshold of sorrow and hope. The physician's announcement and the child's cry make the scene memorable. But there is a risk in treating the newborn as a guaranteed emblem of future reconciliation. The fact that the child survives does not automatically absolve the family's past. It instead asks under what conditions the child will now be raised, and what place Ārtī's voice will have.

The final statement urges family members towards mutual love, tolerance and cooperation. Such direct address is a familiar technique of social theatre, intended to prompt spectators to examine themselves. It is also an aesthetic limitation here: the characters' fates are complicated, whereas the resolution is converted into a general moral maxim. The attempt to erase discord somewhat reduces the gravity of what the play has shown.

9. The Structure of Dialogue: Apology, Reproach, Threat, and Silence

The dialogues can be divided into four recurrent speech acts: reproach, explanation, apology and assertion of authority. Sumitrā's complaints disclose the structure of domestic labour; Ākāś's apologies lay bare the instability of marital trust; Luṭan Kākā's counsel stands for the moral discipline of an older generation; and Rājīv and Komal's debates question the boundaries of personal rights. Similar patterns of verbal conduct recur among several characters, giving the title its significance. 'Conflict' is not the permanent trait of one individual but has become an unsuccessful social method of communication.

Long speeches sometimes clarify a character's ideological position but weaken the action of the stage. In debates about the duties of father and son, in particular, opposing sides often seem to pose and solve their own questions. Where a scene allows brief response, pause or bodily gesture, the subtle tension becomes stronger. The playwright's moral commitment is unmistakable; the critical question is whether the conflict is allowed to find its own end, or explained prematurely in argument.

Silence too deserves attention. Ārtī's scream, sharp replies and the hospital's grief reveal how the crisis of human relationships grows more severe when words are exhausted. These unspoken intervals are important in a performance-oriented text. Meaning arises as much from the scene in which no one answers as from the words that are spoken.

10. The Place of *Kalah* in Modern Maithili Social Drama

To confine the history of Maithili theatre to mythological plots, religious festivals or a supposed classical revival would simplify literary history. Modern Maithili drama has given various forms to social reform, linguistic identity, multilingualism, rural experience, labour and marginalised communities. Recent scholarship underlines the need to reconsider earlier assumptions about that history. In this context, *Kalah* has a distinct importance for putting domestic struggles over authority and the precarious life of a young man at the centre of the stage.

Devkant Jha's history of modern Maithili literature contains a separate discussion of the development of drama and provides a useful broad context for social tendencies in modern theatre. Against that background, Anand Kumar Jha's play may be read as a convergence of reformist impulse and domestic realism. His other titles, including *Badalait Samāj*, *Ṭākāk Mol* and *Mukti Yātrā*, occur in available literary lists, but those titles alone cannot settle the character of his entire dramatic oeuvre without independent reading of each play.

Recent Maithili dramatic criticism increasingly regards the combined study of theatrical performance, characters' social positions and the mechanisms of

exclusion in literary history as necessary. *Kalah* is appropriate for such a combined perspective: the book contains a production record, while the plot centres on an unemployed young man, women's labour and a hospital crisis. The record alone cannot establish how audiences actually received the play in its own period; that would require separate memories of spectators, critical responses and theatrical documentation.

11. Contradictions and Critical Limitations

A work's social purpose is not automatic proof of artistic success. The powerful aspects of *Kalah* are as clear as its contradictions. First, characters sometimes become spokespeople for predetermined moral positions rather than psychologically complex individuals. The father voices authority, the son freedom, the wife humiliation and the friend assistance. This scheme makes the drama legible in reading and performance, but occasionally reduces life's unpredictable complexity.

A second limitation concerns the explanation of the causes of the social crisis. The structural roots of unemployment, women's economic options, workplace safety and the legal questions of inheritance are not extensively explored. Such omissions are not flaws in every case: a play is not a sociological monograph. But when a drama claims to identify a social disease, critical attention to the relationships among causes becomes necessary.

Third is the suddenness of the climax. The conjunction of a factory explosion and childbirth has considerable affective force, but the more sharply it generates pathos, the less room it leaves for investigative explanation. The reader may ask whether a resolution of Ākāś's insecurity, Ārtī's degradation and the family's property disputes could have been possible if the accident had not occurred. This counterfactual question does not deny the play's achievement; it identifies its underlying critical potential.

Fourth is the generalisation of the final instruction. Direct address to an audience can create theatrical contact, but its universal plea to 'abandon conflict' does not adequately name the specific inequalities with which the work's anguish began. If tolerance means only the weak person's compromise, justice remains absent. The ending is therefore more productively understood as the beginning of a critical debate than as the play's final truth.

12. Rereading Dramatic Meaning: Justice, Responsibility, and Coexistence

The most fruitful question arising from *Kalah* is whether preserving a family and securing justice within it are the same thing. The characters desire unity but assign different meanings to it. Honour for the father, rights for the son, recognition of labour for Sumitrā, privacy for Komal, and trust and safety for Ārtī do not mean the same thing. Calling a family 'one' while suppressing its members' separate voices is not a solution.

Ākāś's death is a tragic end related to the narrative's central injustice, but should not become an instrument of moral judgment against any single familial disagreement. Read at its most complex, Ākāś is at once victim and aggressor, son and husband, desiring love and reproducing distrust. Ārtī is at once an insecure wife and an autonomous person asking questions. Sureśvar Bābū upholds discipline, but the fear of old age provides a historical context for his severity. Such a dialectical examination increases the work's human credibility.

From this perspective, *Kalah*, though a drama of familial harmony, becomes a record of continuing disagreement. Social concord cannot remain stable without a just division of labour, respect for autonomous choices, open discussion of inheritance and secure existence for women. Where the play does not answer these questions, its theatrical experience leaves them urgently alive.

Conclusion

A literary evaluation of Anand Kumar Jha's *Kalah* establishes that it is more than a moral tale about domestic disputes. It visually embodies the interwoven strands of economic humiliation, social prestige, generational disagreement, traditional male authority, women's autonomy and the insecurity of workers' lives. The growing conflict of its three acts, interventions by supporting characters such as Luṭan Kākā and Chunmun, multilingual dialogue, changes of setting from home to hospital and its pathetic climax make the work memorable in performance.

Its special achievement lies in the public discussion of what is ordinarily silenced as a 'private family matter'. Its limitation is the tendency to enclose complex inequalities within personal faults, a sudden accident and universal lessons about reconciliation. A joint assessment of these strengths and limitations establishes *Kalah* as a thought-provoking work of modern Maithili social theatre—one that asks spectators not only for compassion but for fresh interpretations of rights and responsibilities.

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Chapter 03 · First Publication of the Play: 2002

The Politics of Character Assassination, Public Morality, and a Changing Society

An Extended Literary-Critical Appraisal of Anand Kumar Jha's Social Play *Badalait Samāj* (A Changing Society)

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Abstract

Anand Kumar Jha's *Badalait Samāj* belongs to that current of modern Maithili social drama in which the everyday life of the village, familial crisis, public morality, and local political self-interest penetrate one another. Its title awakens the expectation of change; at the centre of its narrative, however, is not the effortless advance of change but the violent social process of resistance to it. Amid the body of Avadhesh struggling against an incurable illness, the insecurity of his wife Shobhā, Dīpak's obligations of friendship, and political conspiracy, one question repeatedly emerges: how does society manufacture an allegation against a person and invest that allegation with the status of truth? This question generates the play's primary dramatic energy.

This article critically examines the events of the four acts of the original work; its disposition of characters; the tension between religious belief and medical reason; widow remarriage; panchayat elections; rumour and the policing of women's character; dialogue construction, acting directions, songs, offstage action, scene composition, and judicial intervention. Comparative reference is also made to available research on Maithili theatrical history, while keeping distinct what the dramatic text directly states and the interpretative possibilities it opens. The conclusion is that the work constitutes a significant people-oriented social intervention. Its sharpest achievement lies in exposing the political significance of character assassination; its principal limitation lies in the incomplete presence of women's autonomous decision-making in its final reformist declaration, and in the relatively rapid conversion of complex social crises into resolution.

Keywords

Modern Maithili drama; Anand Kumar Jha; *Badalait Samāj*; character assassination; rural politics; widow remarriage; rumour; theatricality; women's rights; popular belief.

1. Introduction: In What Sense Is Society Changing?

At first glance the title *Badalait Samāj* seems to celebrate transformation. Yet change in this play has a complex character. Political processes have expanded in the village; the vocabulary of elections and party organisation has reached the household courtyard; individuals speak of their rights. At the same time this very

public sphere becomes a new instrument for exercising control over private lives. An individual dreams of changing society, while society engages in the business of changing the public account of that individual's character. Because of this contradiction, the title ceases to be the proclamation of a unilinear ideal and becomes a critical question.

The playwright himself defines the work as a social play based upon politically motivated attempts at character assassination. From the outset this subtitle alerts the reader that the central conflict is not merely the suffering of an ailing young man and his family, but the political exploitation of that suffering and the social system of moral defamation. An appraisal of the work cannot therefore be confined to a synopsis of events or a lesson in good conduct. Its test is how suffering within the home becomes a public dispute; how political self-interest establishes its dominion over the meaning of personal relationships; and how far justice eventually becomes possible.

The fundamental expectation of modern social drama is not that it should solve every question, but that it should reveal to the spectator the concealed structures of social conduct. From this perspective the importance of *Badalait Samāj* lies not only in its direct opposition of virtuous and villainous characters, but in the dramatic presentation of the process through which private life is turned into an object of public suspicion. The spoken language of ordinary people, a father's anxiety, controversies over a wife's chastity, the strategies of political brokers, and society's silence are separate aspects of this structure.

2. The Book, Its Publication, and Its Living Theatrical Context

The work's first edition appeared in 2002. Its publisher is named as Shri Abhayakant Jha, with an address at Menhath, Jhanjharpur, Madhubani. In the introductory "Monak Bāt" ("A Word from the Heart"), the author describes it as his third work and expresses gratitude to readers, performers, friends, and collaborators. Also printed are the director Ganga Jha's remarks under the title "The Play Was Appreciated," and a statement by a theatre practitioner and critic headed "Agbārī" ("Foreword"). Together these paratexts establish the drama not as a work intended solely for solitary reading, but as one created for collective performance and discussion.

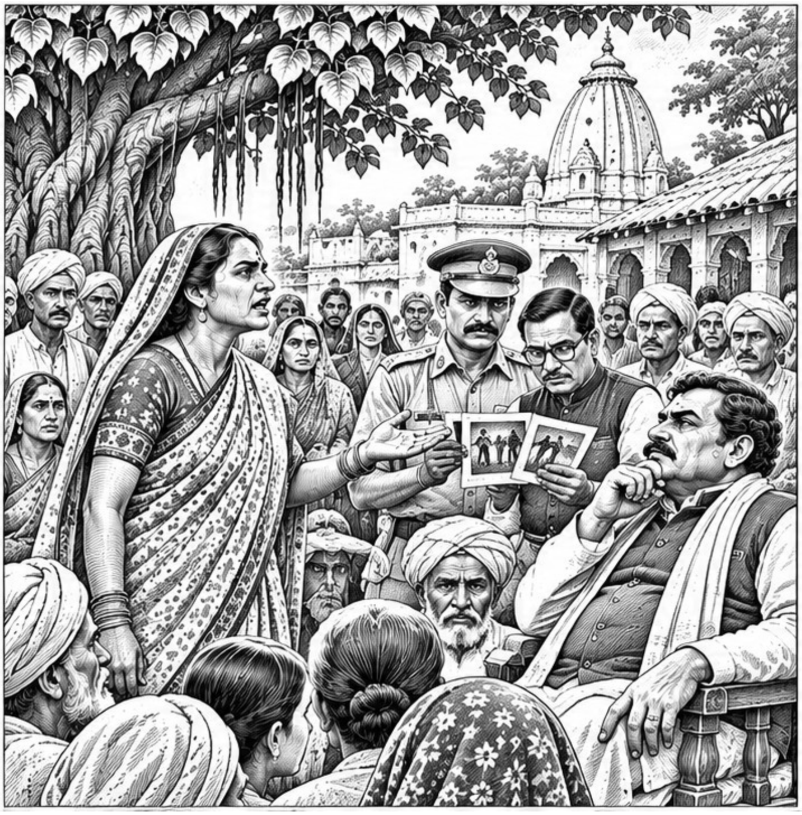
Alongside the dramatis personae, the first staging by Kokil Manch, Kolkata, is recorded. The stated performance date is 27 January 2002, and the venue Mahajati Sadan, Kolkata. The names of those contributing acting, songs, lighting, background music, stage design, make-up, and direction are also entered. The book contains photographs of various acted scenes and of the audience in the auditorium. Such evidence establishes only that the written work was associated with a theatrical production; photographs by themselves do not justify conclusions about the actual quality of acting or the audience's inward response.

This material paratext carries an independent literary significance. A small-scale publishing arrangement, the collective labour of a theatre troupe, the presence of Maithili-speaking spectators in Kolkata, and the author's local circumstances indicate that the work's public life was also fashioned beyond institutions

ordinarily described as the literary mainstream. In an essay on Maithili drama, Shiv Kumar Jha draws attention to this contribution through references to Anand Kumar Jha's works and their cultural environment. Nevertheless, the basis of evaluation must ultimately be the play's own theatrical action, dialogue, and representation of social questions.

3. The Plot's Governing Thread: Illness, Family, and Defamation

Act I opens in a domestic interior: amid a bed, medicines, images of deities, and familial anxiety, Avadhesh lies ill. His wife Shobhā seeks support in worship and hope. Avadhesh comprehends the gravity of his illness and repeatedly raises questions about superstition, medical treatment, death, and the future of those he loves. The helplessness of his father Ghūran, the affectionate reasoning of his mother Kaushalyā, Dīpak's social judgment, and Avadhesh's despair transform the domestic room into a forum for discussion. An ailing body is present onstage from the outset, but many of the principal conflicts will unfold outside that body.



The social tribunal: reputation, testimony, and the public claim to truth

Uncertain of his immediate future, Avadhesh is troubled by the life awaiting his wife Shobhā. Illness and death are two separate forms of suffering; here there is a

third crisis: how will society regard a widow after her husband's death? Within the opening pathos, this question plants the seed of the political conspiracy to come. Marriage, friendship, and responsibility are no longer merely matters of individual goodwill; society begins to determine their meaning through its own gaze. Avadhesh's illness is thus not a static background to the action but the initial impulse behind its moral architecture.

The play consequently operates between two temporalities: the numbered days of illness and the indistinct longue durée of changing social conditions. The patient needs an immediate resolution; society delays its transformation. The father fears for his son's survival, the wife for her existing relationship, the friend for future legal and social consequences. This disparity of time continually produces dramatic tension.

4. Faith and Medicine: Emotional Support versus Epistemic Responsibility

The dialogue between Shobhā's prayer and Avadhesh's reasoning is a distinctive strength of the play. Shobhā seeks refuge in the Goddess's grace during illness; Avadhesh asks why trust should not be accompanied by the actual processes of treatment. His distressed speech contains both resistance to disease and fear of an unknown future. The play does not turn religious faith into a solitary villain: it reveals belief's emotional function, while the need for reason grows urgent when conjecture begins to displace treatment and responsible decision-making.

A delicate distinction is necessary here. Avadhesh's despair, mental instability, and doubts about medicine belong to the experience of a character; none of his utterances should be regarded as the playwright's definitive scientific verdict. Equally, Shobhā's prayer is not merely a sign of ignorance; it is one of the self-protective languages available to a helpless family. The dramatic question is not whether faith should be eliminated altogether, but whether decisions about another person's life should be made on the authority of faith.

The temple, remembrance of the Goddess, and collective assembly retain their importance through the final act. The work therefore does not construct a simple myth of modernity in conflict with tradition; it attempts instead to turn a traditional communal space into a forum for determining public truth. At this juncture its social modernity appears mixed and transitional.

5. Friendship's Obligation, Marriage, and the Question of Widow Remarriage

When Avadhesh's concern about Shobhā's life after his death becomes acute, he raises the question of her remarriage with Dīpak. Dīpak does not offer immediate, effortless assent: he is divided among the proprieties of friendship, social censure, individual responsibility, and possible disgrace. The ethical ground of Avadhesh's insistence is plain—why should his wife be condemned to a solitary life? Yet the argument contains a contradiction: how decisive a voice does she herself possess over her future? Initially the discussion takes place

between male friends; Shobhā's living experience is partly confined to the concern expressed by others.

To proclaim Dīpak an unblemished ideal would diminish the work's actual complexity. He undoubtedly represents decency, the courage of friendship, and social resistance, but the pressure of the village's moral surveillance generates both acquiescence and hesitation in his conduct. On occasion his reaction is physically violent. His character thus becomes not merely a bearer of instruction but the site of psychological and social pressure.

In its closing movement the play seeks the solution to marriage not simply in one friend's personal sacrifice but in a public declaration and the possibility of a new relationship. Vījendra's proposal marks an important turn. The sequence may be understood as a dramatic aspiration towards social reform, although Shobhā's own expressed consent is not developed with sufficient clarity. The distance between the reformist objective and women's autonomy demands further consideration.

6. Act I, Scene Two: The First Deployment of Rumour

In the second scene of Act I, ambitions for village leadership, political prominence, and local power invade the world of private grief. The exchanges among Mandun, Shikhar, and Netājī make clear that some individuals begin calculating advantage and loss as soon as they encounter another's misfortune. Rather than becoming a matter of public concern, the plight of the ailing Avadhesh's family becomes a means of attacking character and standing. Dīpak's forthright opposition provides an immediate counterforce to this corrupt alliance.

Dīpak's physical anger, an offstage roar, and changes of lighting are used to intensify the incident. These devices prevent the scene from remaining an intellectual debate and generate the visible force of social confrontation onstage. Yet the question of how far this glimpse of violent counteraction constitutes a just means of resolution returns in later scenes.

7. Act II: Panchayat Politics and the Market in Votes

The electoral atmosphere of the village becomes dominant in Act II. Bhajendra and Shikhar discuss candidates' reputations, publicity, partisan interests, voter support, and the management of money. The office of *mukhiyā* is ceasing to be a responsibility of public service and becoming a contest to humiliate one's rival. The play exposes the grotesque discrepancy between the dignity of terms such as "leader" and "social worker" and the greed concealed in actual practice.

The panchayat is considered the closest institution of political representation. Here, however, proximity does not guarantee accountability; instead, intimate information from within a family may become a political weapon. The boundary between "home" and "outside" disappears. The ambition to become village head has turned into a marketplace of private prestige, where supporters, intermediaries, and propagandists carry their separate calculations of gain.

Bhajendra matters because he is both a father within a family and a man aspiring to public standing. Dīpak's sense of justice is supported by Bhajendra's social position, yet the same familial relationship becomes an accessible point of pressure for political conspirators. This dual role connects the critique of political ethics to the internal relations of the household.

8. The Distribution of Power: Netājī, Mandun, Shikhar, and Somen

The play's opposing force is not a single, omnipotent villain. Netājī occupies the centre of ostentatious political dominance; Mandun serves as the practical organiser of conspiracy at village level; Shikhar continually supplies information, demonstrates allegiance, and disseminates the language of sycophancy; Somen participates in the flow of organisational obedience and pressure. Their four roles form a miniature network of power. Within this network, the contest for truth is not simply between the true and the false, but between access and distrust.

The recurrence of phrases such as "Speak plainly, tell the whole matter" gives Shikhar a distinctive verbal mannerism. He claims to speak "plainly," but his speech often becomes an instrument of calculation, surmise, fear, and strategic half-truth. The irony of language itself is a creative achievement of the playwright: a display of speaking plainly can become the screen concealing opacity in a democracy.

Netājī's political ambition is not confined to attaining office; it also seeks to destroy the ethical reputation of opponents. The play shows that the arithmetic of voting and the commerce of moral slander are not separate offences but mutually sustaining operations. Those who proclaim themselves the guardians of private morality often have the most opaque interests.

9. Act III: The Making, Repetition, and Circulation of Suspicion

In Act III rumour becomes the principal instrument of plot. Insinuation, incomplete information, fabricated interpretations, and political purpose combine to create an atmosphere of scandal around Shobhā and Dīpak's relationship. Shobhā's grief, Dīpak's assistance, and the household's difficult circumstances are turned from reasons for social sympathy into indications of flawed character. The particular cruelty of the allegation is that the victim must also bear the burden of proving innocence.

Mandun and Netājī's strategy contains two kinds of advantage: weakening a political opponent in public, and turning the female body and women's character into instruments of social control. Political propaganda and patriarchal conceptions of chastity readily form an alliance in allegations of this kind. In the name of the very society that failed to assist the sufferer, the right is claimed to pronounce judgment upon her character.

These scenes also disclose the complexity of "the people." There is no secure basis for assuming that the people will necessarily be just. Public information becomes rumour; yet a public crowd may also become a site of resistance in the cause of justice. The play's public stage oscillates between these two possibilities.

10. The Regulation of Female Character and Shobhā's Limited but Significant Resistance

It would be a critical mistake to reduce Shobhā to the figure of a grieving wife. At the outset she debates treatment and faith with Avadhesh; later she raises her voice in defence of the integrity of her relationship and her self-respect. Her response to calumny reveals that society measures women's behaviour by a standard different from the one applied to men. Speaking with a man, accepting assistance, or remaining alongside someone in a crisis cannot constitute evidence of immoral character: the play gives sharp expression to this fundamental ethical question.

Nevertheless, the work leaves another possibility for women incomplete. Shobhā and Kaushalyā are the only two female figures amid a large assembly of male characters. Their relational identities as wife and mother suppress their individual social existence. Shobhā seeks justice, but the definitive proposal of a new marriage ultimately comes from Vījendra; a woman's desire does not receive sustained dialogue in the form of an autonomous and fully developed argument. Thus the play opposes injustice inflicted upon women, but has not yet fashioned a theatrical order accommodating their complete self-determination.

This limitation must be understood historically, but not excused merely by naming its period. Social reform and women's emancipation are not identical. Acceptance of widow remarriage would be an important change; yet if a widow's wish to marry remains dependent upon a man's proposal and a crowd's assent, the question of freedom remains unsettled. A productive critical rereading of the play can make this difference explicit.

11. Act III's Closing Scene: Public Allegation within the Family

By the final scene of Act III, the conflict between accusation and defence reaches the family itself. Dīpak has to explain his conduct before Bhajendra; the true purpose of the relationship and fear of public defamation appear in a single conversation. His uncertainty between filial honour and the obligations of friendship saves the play from becoming entirely declarative. Each time he asserts his innocence, the politically empowered propagandists repeat the charge.

The social import of this moment is considerable: a charge's lack of credibility does not automatically lessen its social effect. The economy of scandal operates less through evidence than through repetition. The playwright expresses this tragedy through fear, anger, and familial silence.

12. Act IV: Temple, Public Assembly, and Judicial Decision

The first scene of Act IV is set in a temple courtyard, a conventional place of collective belief now employed to initiate debate and juridical understanding. The presence of Somen, Vījendra, and Dīpak indicates that the question of personal character has become an issue of the village's public accountability. Shobhā's forthright resistance and Dīpak's presence place the ethical structure of the false accusation under interrogation.

The second scene of Act IV marks the culmination of collective confrontation. The attempt to establish Dīpak's guilt, the use of a contrived picture, the credibility of testimony, and the arrival of the police all challenge the deceit by which something merely "heard" is converted into supposedly "seen" evidence. Offstage action and the movement of the crowd turn the public square into an informal court. The dramatic centre is no longer Avadhesh's private sickroom but the communal space in which the people assemble.

The final decisive change is brought about through a police officer's intervention, investigation of the allegation, and action against the conspirators. At this point the narrative gives justice institutional legitimacy. Its theatrical limitations should not, however, be overlooked: the knot of multilayered political exploitation is loosened comparatively rapidly by a public exposure and police order. Many deeply rooted questions remain: who bears responsibility among all those who circulated the rumour? How will the practice of suspecting women on grounds of chastity be transformed? How will the distribution of power in panchayat institutions be reformed? The ending does not provide complete answers, but makes these questions inescapable.

13. The Final Proposal's Double Meaning: Remarriage or Public Sanction?

At the conclusion, Vījendra declares his willingness to marry Shobhā. Through this proposal the playwright joins the opening pathos of illness, a woman's social insecurity after bereavement, the humiliation of character assassination, and the aspiration towards reform at a single dramatic point. After a relationship has been encircled by suspicion, the prospect of a new marriage brings the question of social acceptance to the fore. The advocacy of widow remarriage is not merely a display of pity: it is a public refutation of corrupted moral standards.

Yet there are questions within this brightness. Shobhā hears the proposal and her response is conveyed through a stage direction; the opportunity for a clearly articulated, extended expression of personal consent remains limited. It would be inappropriate to regard the declaration of social reform as the full achievement of women's rights. The criticism here does not oppose the play's purpose, but offers a discriminating assessment of its historical achievement: the work breaks the pretence of morality used to oppose widow remarriage, without carrying the independent language of women's judgment to the ultimately decisive position.

14. Characterisation: Ideals, Dilemmas, and Opposing Forces

Avadhesh, Dīpak, and Shobhā form the emotional axis of the work, but are not characters of the same kind. Avadhesh struggles with an awareness of death and helplessness; illness makes him not a hedonist but a human being troubled by the ethical consequences of the future. Dīpak embodies the courage of resistance, although fear of society's punishments introduces uncertainty into his conduct. Shobhā is the immediate target of public humiliation, and her voice against it provides a human basis for the work's reformist intention.

Ghūran's position is double. As a father, he is distraught over his son's life, but he remains within the customary limits of patriarchal authority. Kaushalyā represents domestic anxiety, reasoning informed by proverbial wisdom, and an awareness of the household's realities. Bhajendra occupies an uncertain position between family honour and the ambition for public office. Together these threads of relationship raise the play beyond an elementary conflict between two camps.

Mandun, Shikhar, Netājī, and Somen occupy distinctly antagonistic positions. If their differences are neglected in performance, all four may become declaimers in the same voice. The playwright's dialogue nonetheless offers distinct shades of Shikhar's cunning, Mandun's practical ruthlessness, Netājī's appetite for office, and Somen's follower mentality. The villains' inner lives, social origins, and ethical conflicts receive comparatively little development. This heightens the conflict's sharpness but somewhat restricts psychological plurality.

15. The Social Movement of Dialogue and the Intimacy of Language

The play draws strength from the pace of everyday speech. Forms of address expressing village and household relationships, rapid questioning and response, insults uttered in anger, the idiom of ordinary people, and recurring slogan-like phrases give the narrative a living environment. Language is an instrument of theatrical conversation here, not ornamental embellishment. A character's social identity often emerges from the manner of speaking. The significance of its Maithili stage-language therefore cannot be reduced to "natural" diction: dialogue also constructs relations of communicative power, pressure, fear, and resistance.

A second aspect is that characters sometimes state explicit ethical conclusions at considerable length. When Dīpak expounds upon social rights, women's dignity, and politicians' self-interest, dramatic action occasionally gives way to oratory. Such dialogue may well have proved effective in community theatre at the time, yet on the page it can lessen the uncertainty indispensable to dramatic events. The work's true achievement is in the balance between verbal intensity and theatrical action; weakness appears where characters begin delivering lessons about their circumstances rather than living them.

It would be wrong simply to dismiss this style as an error or an "excess." The performance environment of rural social drama often depends upon explicit statements, public confrontation, and emotional counterargument. The relevant question is where speech creates theatrical experience and where its expansion slackens dramatic concentration. Making this distinction enables the reader to assess the work's strengths and weaknesses more justly.

16. Acting Directions, Songs, Lighting, and Changes of Scene

The original text supplies directions for entrances and exits, bodily postures, anger, raised hands, tears, laughter, blows, offstage roaring, flashes of lightning, and darkness. The author is therefore not writing a dispute conducted only in words; he is imagining the sequence of experiences offered to an audience. The

domestic sickbed in Act I, the political meeting in Act II, the home infected by rumour in Act III, and the temple courtyard in Act IV together create a visual expansion of social life.

Prayer and song have central functions. Shobhā's devotional singing gives joint expression to illness, fear, and hope; when characters are defeated in reasoning, song affords them emotional refuge. From the perspective of dramatic theory, the dispositions of the consequent and transitory states associated with *karuṇa-rasa* may be discerned here. Yet such emotional sympathy does not wholly deprive spectators of critical social thought; rather, compassion impels them to question the cruelty of character assassination.

Photographs from the staging are themselves particular documents. They show stage decoration, moments of acting, and an assembled audience, providing historical evidence of the work's relation to performance. Photographs, however, cannot constitute complete independent evidence for critical evaluation: voice, rhythm, audience response, the cumulative force of acting, and the duration of scene changes cannot be contained in still images. Reading the stage directions while recognising this limitation yields a more restrained analysis.

17. From Pathos to Heroic Resistance: *Rasa* and Dramatic Emotional Movement

Compassion is the prevailing sentiment in the early scenes. The helplessness of the ailing Avadhesh, Shobhā's prayer, and Ghūran's uncertainty invite the spectator's sympathy. The action does not, however, remain within pathos: Dīpak's opposition and the struggle against public injustice bring forth anger and heroic resolve. The circulation of rumour produces fear and disgust, while the expectation of justice and social acceptance eventually moves towards hope. This emotional movement cannot easily be confined within a single dominant *rasa*.

Figuratively, the emotional structure of *Badalait Samāj* moves from the intensely private suffering of faith to the public contention of communal ethics. Its succession of spaces, from courtyard to temple and household to panchayat, provides a visual parallel to this movement. Characters who weep in the initial scenes begin to ask questions or present evidence in the last. One meaning of transformation in the play, then, is the movement from emotional passivity towards civic resistance.

Nevertheless, the climactic intervention of institutional justice resolves the fabricated allegation without fully developing a profound dramatic experience of collective guilt. The spectator may find satisfaction in the villains' downfall, but the challenge of self-criticism concerning the social structure of defamation does not endure for equally long. This difference marks the boundary between the drama's success in public communication and the limits of its literary complexity.

18. Evidence, Perception, and the Crisis of Political Assertion

The work's fundamental social question is also a question of knowledge and evidence. What makes a statement true? What is heard in the village, partisan testimony, a photograph, and police investigation do not possess identical probative value. Those circulating accusations clothe conjecture in the language of established fact. When society accepts this confusion, an innocent person's public existence is placed at risk. In this respect the work is also a drama of the village's epistemic order: distinguishing what has been seen, what has been heard, and what has been inferred is essential to civic justice.

Rather than forcibly imposing the terminology of Navya-Nyāya upon the play, it is more appropriate to ask general questions concerning the discernment of evidence. Investigation of a purported proof's source, purpose, and alternative interpretations weakens the foundations of an allegation manufactured by power. This lends importance to the final public deliberation. Yet the establishment of judicial truth is comparatively swift in the play; its narrative does not develop an extensive account of the labour of fact-finding.

This incompleteness can itself be read as a productive question posed by the work: should spectators simply accept the police decision, or will they also assume responsibility for verifying what they hear in their own social conduct? The real measure of social change lies in the answer to the second question.

19. The Work's Place in the Tradition of Maithili Drama

The history of Maithili drama is not merely a succession of royal courts, mythological narratives, and celebrated authors. Modern dramatic literature also encompasses social resistance, inexpensive print, village productions, uncelebrated acting troupes, and the theatre of the migrant Maithili community. Recent work on Maithili theatrical history—including a study of the multilingual world of Raghunandana Das's *Mithilānāṭaka* and a renewed reading of an early drama by Brij Bihari Lal Mandal—shows that literary history is shaped by social standing and the availability of archives. These findings should not be transferred uncritically to Anand Kumar Jha's play, but they offer a methodological lesson: less-discussed theatrical worlds should be evaluated through their actual texts and evidence of performance.

Within this wider tradition *Badalait Samāj* attempts to translate the contemporary crises of the village into Maithili theatrical language. Its centre contains neither a royal lineage nor a mythological miracle, but a sick young man, a humiliated woman, an anxious father, the lure of panchayat office, factionalism, manufactured defamation, and civic justice. Its significant contribution lies in making local social vocabulary a vehicle for political dissent on the Maithili stage. Discussion of the work is also available in relation to the author's other social plays, although each needs evaluation on the basis of its own theatrical construction.

The list of studies on Maithili drama published by the Sahitya Akademi indicates that an independent research tradition has developed around the historical growth and communal character of modern Maithili theatre. In this broader

literary map, however, the value of *Badalait Samāj* lies not in a supposed representativeness but in its particular insight: recognition of the public exploitation of women's character in struggles for power.

20. Achievements and Limitations: An Integrated Assessment

The first achievement is that the author does not restrict social violence to physical assault or offences defined by law. Accusation, disparagement, gesture, half-truth, and politically cultivated suspicion may themselves assume forms of violence. A second is the establishment of a relation between individual crisis and public politics. Avadhesh's illness and Shobhā's standing initially appear to belong to the private family, but eventually become central stakes in the struggle for power. Third is the theatrical dignity of vernacular Maithili: the characters' speech reveals both social position and dramatic purpose.

A fourth achievement concerns theatrical structure. Through the acts, tension rises from concentrated domestic pathos to panchayat manoeuvring, the scandal of Act III, and public judgment in Act IV. Music, lighting, scenic design, and debate before spectators make the construction performable. The fifth achievement is the centrality of Shobhā's dignity and the question of remarriage: the ethical aspiration towards social reform remains active to the end.

The first limitation is the black-and-white separation of characters. The adversaries' social and psychological motivations are often compressed into opportunism and malice. Second, some dialogue expands into instruction, so that the play occasionally sounds like a public meeting. Third, from illness to the proposal of remarriage, male speech making decisions occupies more space than the woman's own independent reasoning. Fourth, the final police intervention reduces complicated structural problems to the guilt and punishment of particular individuals. Fifth, the play offers hope that truth will prevail without resolving the question of restitution for the damage already inflicted by the society that spread the humiliation.

This balance of strengths and weaknesses is the proper justice of criticism. *Badalait Samāj* can neither be dismissed as nothing more than a reformist manifesto nor glorified as the complete solution to every social question. It is a powerful, sometimes excessively declaratory, yet consistently people-oriented dramatic expression of the social anxieties of a particular time. The meaning of a "changing" society here resides less in a final outcome than in an ongoing struggle.

21. Conclusion

Anand Kumar Jha's *Badalait Samāj* shows readers that when politics enters society's most intimate relationships, ordinary assistance may be publicised as an illicit liaison, compassion as self-interest, and friendship as conspiracy. The relation between a man struggling against illness and a woman struggling for her dignity carries the drama towards serious questions of human worth and public morality. The quasi-judicial public assembly, scrutiny of purported evidence, and proposal of remarriage appear as forms of reformist hope.

The play's greatest critical strength is its demonstration of the political productivity of character assassination. Its incompleteness lies in its insufficient development of the complete process of the social change it desires: women's clearly autonomous decisions, institutional accountability, and collective self-examination of rumour. This incompleteness does not, however, extinguish its question; it increases the work's contemporary relevance. Society may claim to have changed only when it becomes compassionate towards the ill, just towards women, sceptical of political assertions, and attentive to evidence in the face of accusation. Judged by this standard, *Badalait Samāj* remains with the reader not as a chronology of events but as a continuing ethical challenge.

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Chapter 04 · First Publication of the Play: 2003

Dhadhāit Navakī Kaniyāk Lahās: A Dramaturgical Critique of Familial Disintegration, Female Autonomy, and Moral Terror

A Text-Centred Critical Study of Anand Kumar Jha's Play

Abstract: Anand Kumar Jha's *Dhadhāit Navakī Kaniyāk Lahās* ("The Burning Corpse of the New Bride") is a social drama founded upon the intersecting tensions of the joint family, new marriage, economic dependency, the rural–urban divide, and women's desire. Across three acts and nine scenes, the marital dispute between Shikhā and Samīr gradually becomes a wider social crisis through Megheshwar's illness, Ritesh's interrupted schooling, intercepted letters, lack of money for treatment, and disputes over ancestral property. Its title evokes the fear of imminent death and a burning body; yet the dramatic outcome is not death, but rescue and family reunion. In light of this contradiction the article examines the title's meaning, the causal composition of the plot, the psychological disposition of characters, the realist craft of rural theatre, class power, domestic labour, and the ideological limits of women's rights within the work. The study concludes that the play's greatest importance resides in its sharp presentation of social questions, although its moral resolution rapidly converts women's disagreement into culpability and restricts the plural reality of society.

Keywords: Maithili social drama; Anand Kumar Jha; joint family; female autonomy; newly married couple; folk-oriented performance; family economics; rural theatre; *karuṇa-rasa*; dramatic irony.

1. Introduction: The Book, Its Creative Milieu, and the Questions of Criticism

At first Anand Kumar Jha's *Dhadhāit Navakī Kaniyāk Lahās* appears to be a tale of domestic conflict; read more deeply, it discloses numerous conflicts of modern Mithila operating simultaneously in a single courtyard. An educated young man's departure from the village for urban employment; responsibility for maintaining the ancestral home; a new daughter-in-law's aspiration towards an independent life; the unequal distribution of labour and income; care for an ageing patient; a child's education; and the insecure position of a servant: all these problems enter the characters' ordinary conversations. "Family" here is not simply a site of love but a changing structure made of institutions of resources, prestige, decision-making power, and responsibility. Consequently, the work's

literary complexity cannot be disposed of merely by pronouncing an ethical verdict upon the new bride's character.

The book's publication particulars give its first edition as Jānaki Navamī, 11 May 2003, with Prachi Prakashan, Menhath–Jhanjharpur–Madhubani, as publisher. Its opening matter refers to a staging by Shri Prabhakar Abhinay Samiti at Gandhwari on 12 October 2002. Criticism of the work therefore requires attention to the relationship between printed dialogue and the tradition of actual performance. The clear arguments, forceful exchanges, scene changes, and culminating dramatic crisis of a play devised for a collective audience at a rural festival should not be treated as though it were intended only for reading in a library.

The author's other plays—*Ṭākāk Mol*, *Kalah*, *Badalait Samāj*, and *Haṭhāt Parivartan*—form a sequence of broader social concerns. A sign of his standing beyond these productions also occurs in the Sahitya Akademi's Yuva Puraskar record: in 2011 the play *Haṭhāt* by Anand Kumar Jha received the award. Institutional recognition does not, however, automatically demonstrate the aesthetic merit of this particular work; the contradictions of each drama must be examined independently. Its form can be understood within the tradition of parallel theatre in Mithila that creates public debate through performance in villages.

The inquiry pursued here has five aspects. First, how credible are the causal relationships that advance the plot? Second, is the "new bride" a social character or a symbol of moral fault determined in advance? Third, what possibilities for acting are created by dialogue, stage directions, and spatial settings? Fourth, what distribution of power within the family emerges through issues of property and medical expenses? Fifth, how does the tension between the "burning corpse" of the title and the eventual happy ending alter the play's meaning? To approach these questions, the three acts, nine scenes, prefatory essays, and performance details have been compared on a textual basis.

2. Initial Reception and the Ideological Limits of the Prefatory Materials

The published book contains several forewords and pieces of congratulatory writing in addition to the author's own remarks. An essay entitled "About This Play" discusses the performability of social drama, its emphasis on dialogue, and changes in the traditional family. "A Master of Dramatic Literature" regards the play as a social mirror in defence of the joint family. An introductory letter written in English particularly praises Shikhā's "error" and the ultimate reconciliation of the family. These responses clarify the work's immediate reception: it was presented to readers and audiences as a moral intervention designed to preserve the family. Such appreciation is useful evidence for literary history, but criticism need not stop at repeating its conclusions.

An important distinction must be understood. In the prefatory writers' view, Shikhā's dissent is chiefly the result of selfishness and bad judgment; the drama's actual dialogue, however, raises concrete questions about a separate household, privacy, the use of ancestral property, the economic burden of dependent relatives, and the balance of authority between husband and wife. If these matters are considered as sociological problems, Shikhā's decisions can be criticised without automatically condemning every autonomous wish of a woman as immoral. This is where literary criticism begins to differ from a prosecution of a character.

The play also exceeds those prefatory judgments. On one hand, it passes from ordinary family joking to genuine disagreement; on the other, images of the ailing body and the deathbed turn domestic strife into a question of terrifying public consequence. An indirect question arises: under what conditions can familial unity be just? Neither the younger member's sacrifice alone nor the elder's authority alone suffices; what is required is a just allocation of reciprocal responsibilities. The drama repeatedly approaches this issue, then resolves it instead through emotional forgiveness and moral transformation.

3. The Three-Act Structure: From Conflict to Crisis and Crisis to Resolution

3.1. Act I: The Desire to Live Separately and the Uncertainty of the Shared Household

In the first scene, the conversation between Samīr and Shikhā begins in personal discontent. Samīr explains that his elder brother's protection has been decisive in his life; Shikhā insists upon an independent urban household. For Shikhā, a marital home also means a world of the couple's own. For Samīr, that world is naturally composed of elder brother and sister-in-law, children, and existing obligations. The opening dialogue thus brings two meanings of "home" into collision. The presence of Sushīlā and Ritesh transforms a private dispute into a matter of deliberation before the family. In the early laughter, domestic satire, and casual conversation, the seeds of a much larger impending conflict are already present.

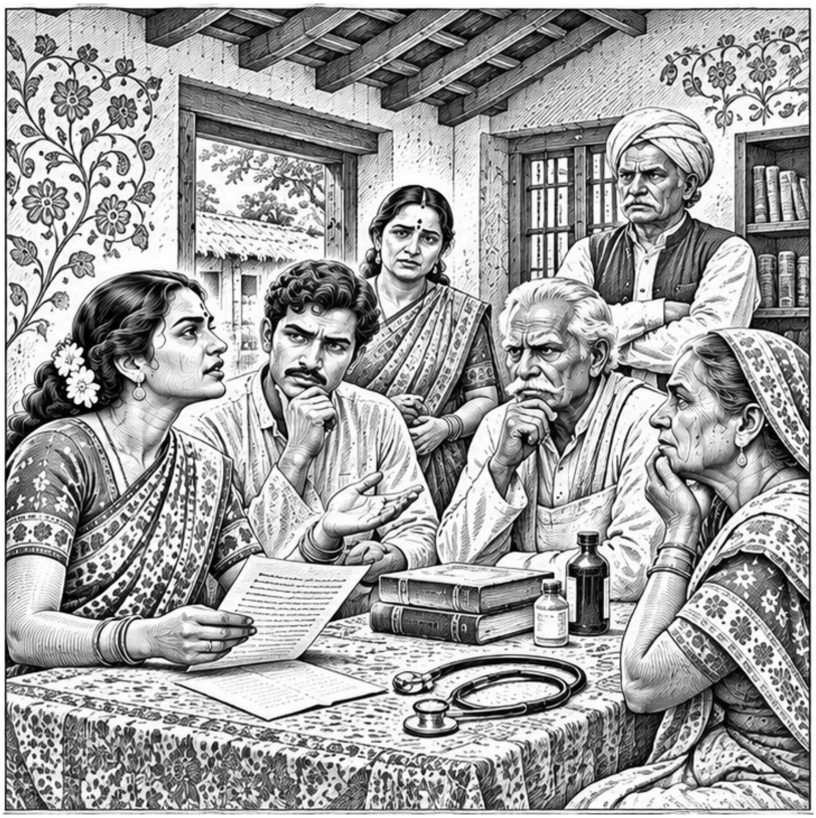
The second scene opens upon Megheshwar Babu's *dalān*. The *dalān*—where men can exchange advice, news of illness, and discussion of village finances—creates a social space distinct from the bedroom of the first scene. Megheshwar's ill health, his dependence upon medicine, and economic anxiety, together with Shobhan's bitter comments, place the cost of the younger brother's success in question. Megheshwar does not dismiss Samīr as an unmitigated villain: affection and anger coexist in his dialogue. Shobhan's pronouncements, however, establish a rigid public morality of duty in which very little room remains for Samīr's individual life.

The third scene sharpens the disagreement between Shikhā and Sushīlā, woman against woman. With Samīr's entrance, the question "Whose fault is it?" becomes a form of accusation and counteraccusation. Sushīlā asks for a peaceful conversation with the newly married younger woman; Shikhā understands the appeal as an insult, while Samīr reads dissent as a breach of family discipline. Amid this dispute, Ritesh's college education and fees recall the material necessities of life. The scene is dramatically indispensable because it links familial conflict to economic resources and a dependent child's future.

3.2. Act II: The Obstruction of Messages and the Deepening of Moral Apprehension

In the first scene of Act II Megheshwar's health deteriorates. Shobhan and Sushīlā are anxious, and Ritesh is caught between his education and household obligations. The question of money for treatment arises, but more consequential than the sum itself is the process of communicating information: will a letter be written, will it reach Samīr, and will it have arrived too late? These doubts raise the drama beyond ordinary instruction into a temporally charged anticipation. The distance between village and city becomes not only a distance in miles but a gap in communication and trust.

The second scene takes place in Samīr's city flat. Shikhā attributes all the household's achievements to her own efforts and its different environment. Samīr has received no clear news from the village and awaits a letter. Shobhan's arrival and questioning of Rāmlāl gradually disclose that the delivery of letters has been deliberately obstructed. Desire for money, an employer's trust, and power within the house together become dramatic causes. As the exchanges grow sharper, Samīr's fury towards Shikhā reaches its climax. This scene concentrates the play's ethical conflict in one definite action: withholding urgently needed news, with the possible result of delaying treatment for the sick man.



The disputed letter: illness, property, and familial responsibility

In the third scene Ritesh describes a situation in which he must abandon his studies to take up domestic labour. Shikhā disregards his plight or questions its truthfulness; Samīr finally resolves to create conditions in which Ritesh can study. The relation between marital disagreement and a child's educational future becomes explicit. Education, it should be noted, is not merely a slogan: it requires school fees, clothing, travel, and time free from domestic work. The play situates Ritesh's education in the context of Megheshwar's family's economic deprivation, and this is one of its powerful moments of social realism.

3.3. Act III: The Economics of Treatment, Disputes over Property, and the Preservation of Life

The first scene of Act III returns to Megheshwar's home. His illness has become more serious, surgery is said to be necessary, and the cost of treatment appears beyond the family's means. At this moment Ritesh considers abandoning education, Shobhan attempts to raise funds, and Shyamlakant offers assistance within his capacity. With these figures the play expands its ethical sphere: "family" is not simply consanguinity; neighbours, friends, service workers, and

shared social trust also become active during crisis. The arrangements for assistance nevertheless remain uncertain: a clear gulf persists between assurances and the actual availability of money.

The second scene shifts to Samīr's urban office. A letter arrives from the village that specifies the practical issues of illness, debt, treatment, and property. Shikhā argues for the right to sell land; Samīr maintains that it would be wrong to dispose of the elder brother's share of the property in order to save his life. "Right" and "duty" here become two different linguistic fields. The dramatic writing directs Shikhā's argument towards selfishness, yet a fundamental question remains for the reader: how is a woman's voice to be recognised in decisions about ancestral property, and who should justly bear the expenses of the elder brother's treatment? Both the strength and the limitation of this scene lie in its eventual reduction of an economic problem to a dispute about virtue.

In the final scene the dispute reaches the extreme limit of personal injury. Shikhā makes a declaration of self-destruction, giving concrete verbal form to the image of a "burning corpse" in the title. Ritesh's and Rāmlāl's swift reactions, the doctor's arrival, and Samīr's remorse avert the crisis. Shikhā asks forgiveness, Samīr is likewise ashamed of his harsh conduct, and Megheshwar and Sushīlā are invited back into the family. The conclusion is happy; to understand the price of that happiness, however, one must ask whose transformation was most necessary for saving the relationship.

4. The Title's Dramatic Irony: Not a Burning Body but Burning Relationships

From the outset, the title *Dhadhāit Navakī Kaniyāk Lahās* draws the reader towards fear, violence, and possible death. "Dhadhāit" evokes the intensity of fire; "navakī kaniyā" the vulnerable life of a newly married woman; and "lahās" the terror of a living person's transformation into a lifeless body. Such a title may activate readers' memories of domestic violence, the oppression of newly married women, and deaths associated with dowry in Mithila. Yet no such occurrence is an established fact within the play; it appears as an impending possibility, a character's utterance, and a form of emotional terror. To treat the title as an announcement of an event that actually occurs would contradict the text.

The difference between title and plot is meaningful. What the author makes the reader fear, the stage prevents from happening. Medical intervention at the final moment forestalls death, and the work assumes the form of social reconciliation rather than a tragedy of suffering. This is its principal dramatic device: by showing the shadow of possibly irreversible loss, it makes the audience feel the cost of familial disintegration. Yet this device also produces ethical complexity. Has suicidal crisis been made the final means of preserving the family? The plot does not endorse such a conclusion, for the characters themselves act to save a life; nevertheless, the scenic organisation cannot avoid the question.

In literary terms the "corpse" of the title can be understood both as metaphor and as an alarming hyperbole. The ethical implications of calling a living woman a "corpse" are open to criticism, since the comparison risks effacing her complete humanity. Conversely, it may also represent a relationship approaching social death. A successful reading maintains this tension of double meaning: it would be an error either to regard the book as the story of a new bride actually burned to death, or to dismiss the title's threat as wholly meaningless sensationalism.

5. Female Autonomy, the Image of the Daughter-in-Law, and the Language of Domestic Power

Shikhā's characterisation is the play's most controversial creative decision. From the first scene she wishes for a separate home, expresses the need for a life belonging to husband and wife, and refuses automatically to accept responsibility for the extended family. These are all possible questions of modern marriage; the existence of such wishes cannot itself establish her guilt. The author's design, however, progressively links Shikhā's utterances to hostility towards the family, cruel neglect, obstruction of correspondence, and avarice. In this construction her autonomous voice and the traditional pattern of the villainous character compete with one another. Shikhā argues her position, yet the plot repeatedly neutralises that reasoning through the faults of her conduct.

Sushīlā forms a contrasting female figure. She stands for respect towards older relations, domestic restraint, Ritesh's welfare, and care for Megheshwar. Her speech is not devoid of bitterness, but the plot gives ethical sanction to her endurance. A significant critical question arises: is Sushīlā's virtue the conscious choice of a capable woman, or the product of an arrangement that assumes the entire burden of household care to be unpaid women's labour? The play does not explicitly measure the value of this work. Equally, questions of the division of labour, living space, and marital privacy within Shikhā's anger are not developed independently. Thus the conflict between the two women is to a considerable degree restricted to a moral contest of woman against woman.

The family's arrangement of authority is abundantly clear. Megheshwar's *dalān* is a place of social decision-making; Samīr's office represents modern economic standing; Shikhā asserts a claim over household arrangements and ancestral property; Sushīlā sustains the home's moral order. Male labour is represented largely in the language of income, duty, and legal entitlement, women's work in that of care, propriety, and devotion to husbands. The play partially exposes the injustice of this division but does not ultimately imagine changing it fundamentally. This is its historical and social limitation, to be recognised as a meaningful contradiction rather than dismissed by a general excuse.

Both Shikhā's apology and Samīr's repentance are present in the final scene, a significant fact. Yet the dramatic weight falls more heavily upon Shikhā's correction. Her initial demand—the need for an independent life—is not

reconsidered in principle; only its violent consequences are defeated. The emotional acceptance attained at the end is necessary to the preservation of the relationship, but it leaves an additional material question: after reconciliation, what equitable arrangement will govern property, treatment, household expenditure, and private decisions? The play leaves this question open within its happy ending.

6. Megheshwar, Samīr, and Ritesh: Three Generations of Responsibility

Megheshwar is the drama's ethical axis, although it would also be mistaken to turn him into an entirely blameless icon. The early episodes establish that he helped Samīr gain education, employment, and social advancement; the play's conception of family rests upon this debt to the past. His ailing body makes the invisible economy of the deprived household visible. The sum required for treatment becomes a repeated test of responsibility. Yet Megheshwar, in his position as elder brother, also expects the authority due to his relation. The mixture of affection, dissatisfaction, and self-respect lends him a degree of human depth beyond a didactic ideal.

Samīr embodies the genuine duality of a modern salaried person. He recognises his debt to his native village, but information from the family home has become irregular in his urban life. Attempting simultaneously to placate his wife and respect his brother, he reaches for humiliating language in anger. At moments his affection becomes a display of entitlement rather than responsibility. It is therefore difficult to regard Samīr as right throughout. He preserves the memory of his elder brother's sacrifice, takes the initiative in securing Ritesh's education, and assists with treatment; at the same time his uncontrolled anger worsens Shikhā's crisis. His final apology contains a partial admission of this fault.

Ritesh represents the third generation. The interruption of his studies is one of the play's actual social injuries. The urban advancement enjoyed by Samīr, founded upon labour and opportunity, is unavailable to Ritesh: the boy's time is absorbed by domestic work, economic insecurity, and travel. Without this inequality, the insistence upon family unity would ring hollow. Ritesh carries letters, experiences, and distress between elder and younger brothers; although a child, he is a dramatically active character. His intervention on witnessing the suicidal crisis is not merely childish sentimentality but a human expression of social responsibility. In this sense he extends the play's ethics to the coming generation.

Shobhan, Megheshwar's friend and an active witness to events, uses language as an instrument of public social pressure. Shyamlakant's episode introduces administrative employment, conditions of service, the difficulties of retirement, and neighbourly assistance. These supporting characters should not be dismissed as mere mechanisms for advancing the plot: through them the domestic household is situated between village, workplace, and communal ties.

Nevertheless, Shyamlakant's employment circumstances and the expanded question of land arrangements occasionally become detached from the central dramatic current; greater formal concentration might have integrated these threads more tightly with the governing conflict.

7. Poverty, Medical Treatment, Property, and Implicit Class Relations

The drama's economic world continually invokes medicine, education, government employment, salary, correspondence, household expenditure, and ancestral fields. These are not mere background objects; they are points at which the plot must make decisions. Raising the cost of Megheshwar's treatment is difficult for the family, Ritesh's studies are interrupted, and Samīr's urban employment creates great expectations. Sometimes this economic inequality expands from personal relationships into a structural question; at other times it is compressed into a test of individual moral conduct. The play's social truth resides in this oscillation.

Rāmlāl is especially important. As a household servant he exercises a degree of control over news passing between his employers, the doorway, and domestic arrangements; yet his own security depends upon their temper. In the disclosure that a letter was withheld, greed, fear, and subordination in service operate together. Samīr's interrogation becomes a threat, while Rāmlāl's testimony becomes decisive evidence of what happened. In conventional moral terms the scene may be called an exposure of deceit; class criticism raises another question: how much opportunity for independent judgment is granted to the servant from a subordinate social class? His voice is heard largely between deferential forms of address towards the master and fear.

The ancestral fields become the centre of confrontation in the last act. Shikhā employs the language of property rights; Samīr argues from the duty to preserve his elder brother's life. The social significance disappears if the issue is understood merely as "selfishness versus altruism." The real question is how ancestral property should be distributed among personal entitlement, hereditary succession, support for the elderly, and emergency medical care. The play does not offer a verified exposition of any legal rule; claims about the law made by characters must therefore not be taken as independently established legal truths. Yet these claims are themselves evidence of a social attitude in which the modern language of rights is entering an old domestic order.

The opposition between shortage of money and insistence upon respect sometimes becomes dramatically acute and sometimes inadequately prepared. On one side, treatment requires thousands of rupees; on the other, the characters cut off communication in anger. Its realism would have become broader had the play questioned collective labour, access to public medicine, distance from healthcare, and concrete arrangements of inheritance more fully. The absence of

social institutions is itself worthy of criticism: behind the patient's individual crisis, the public health system remains comparatively invisible.

8. Letters, Silence, and Time: The Plot's Causal Construction

The "letter" is an exceptionally important narrative instrument in this work. News of Megheshwar's illness, the need for money, and the family's crisis is expected to reach the city by correspondence. Writing a letter, trusting it, stopping it, receiving no reply, and then suffering an explosion of news: across this sequence the play builds suspense upon the delay of information. Uncertainty arising from the interval between letters also becomes a metaphor for Samīr's actual distance from his family. A family is not merely the name of a house but also a network of reliable communication; when that network breaks, physical distance becomes still more dangerous.

The letter episode gives the audience information that differs, in stages, from what particular characters know. Dramatic irony emerges between the spectator's awareness of what is happening in the village and ignorance in the city. At certain points the disclosure is excessively direct: admissions of guilt and announcements of truth arrive too rapidly. Yet this explicitness may be useful in a folk-theatre setting, where spectators see the action from a distance and clarity of verbal delivery makes the story comprehensible. Thus what may seem exaggerated from the reader's position can partly arise from the needs of a collective theatrical experience.

Time advances sequentially: Act I reveals the fracture in relationships; Act II deepens it through delay and deceit; Act III brings the medical crisis and the crisis of self-destruction together. But the final rescue is completed with extreme speed. The rapid passage of characters from a life-and-death emergency to healthy family reunion strains credibility. In performance, silence, lighting, pauses for medical information, and the characters' hesitation could expand the transition and strengthen its emotional effect.

9. The Language of Theatre, Stage Directions, and Folk-Oriented Acting

The play is divided into three acts and nine scenes. Limited settings—Samīr's house, Megheshwar's *dalān*, and the city flat and office—make stage construction practical. Within the dialogue, parenthetical instructions specify a character's gaze, vocal intensity, loud laughter, entrances, standing, sitting, and emotional pauses. These directions demonstrate the author's concern both to let spectators hear and see the characters' behaviour. Familiar spaces resembling actual sitting rooms, entry through doors, letters, cups, medicine, money, and chairs acquire dramatic significance.

Bharata's distinction between *lokadharmī* and *nāṭyadharmī* modes of expression in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* can serve here as a judicious point of reference. The familiar speech of domestic life, household activities, and everyday locations indicate a

lokadharmī tendency; the title's terrifying image, heightened monologues, last-minute intervention, and theatrical signals also extend the meaning beyond direct realism in a *nāṭyadharmī* manner. The two should not be treated as wholly separate and opposing compartments, since practical acting on a rural stage can combine them. Dramatic theory is a tool for reading the play, not proof that the author consciously followed this classical classification.

At the linguistic level, domestic Maithili idiom, social forms of address, and English expressions associated with the educated urban class coexist. English terminology in Samīr and Shikhā's disputes, an apology in English, and office-related terms mark an urban identity, while the speech of Megheshwar, Sushīlā, Shobhan, and Ritesh carries a stronger intimacy of village community. Such linguistic mixing distinguishes social position. In some passages English expressions interrupt the emotional rhythm, yet they can also be read as dramatic signs of migration and aspirations to social standing.

Many exchanges assume the form of extended moral lectures. Megheshwar and Shobhan's arguments on the village *dalān*, Samīr's urban self-reproach, and the final familial forgiveness do more than disclose individual psychology: they also undertake explicit instruction. At these points speech can cease to be a human exchange and sound like an address to a public assembly. Capable direction might bring such passages alive through physical action, pauses, eye contact, and opportunities for response.

10. The Disposition of Feeling: Pathos and the Tensions of Melodrama

The dominant emotional movement passes from domestic humour to dissatisfaction, from dissatisfaction to fury, from fury to fear, and from fear to pathos. Light satire appears in Samīr and Shikhā's first quarrel; compassion increases with news of Megheshwar's illness, indignation attends the discovery of the intercepted letter, and the climax turns imminent death into the highest intensity of fear. The final apologies bring feelings of appeasement and reunion. The play thus uses emotion not merely for entertainment but to convey a social message of familial responsibility.

Yet the construction of compassion raises the question of whose suffering receives greater credibility. The work is sympathetic towards Megheshwar's bodily pain and Ritesh's educational deprivation. It gives comparatively little attention to the possible causes of Shikhā's isolation, insecurity, or need for personal space; her suffering becomes fully visible only when she reaches the extremity of the final scene. Compassion is therefore not impartial; it is directed by the plot's ethical arrangement. This is an aesthetic fact requiring social interpretation.

The presence of melodrama is clear: grave illness, delayed news, shortage of money, sudden exposure of wrongdoing, emotional journeys between village and city, and rescue at the last moment. Melodrama should not automatically be regarded as an inferior theatrical form. Its intensity can produce collective

resonance in folk performance. Its principal danger, however, is simplification: when an entire crisis appears to arise from one character's fault and is deemed solved by that character's repentance, the institutional causes of suffering recede. This limitation is repeatedly felt in the present work.

11. A Feminist Rereading: Incomplete Answers to the Right Questions

For a feminist reader Shikhā produces opposing responses. Her deceitful conduct and withholding of an essential letter are unquestionably open to ethical criticism; there is no reason to hesitate over that judgment. But it is logically another matter to conflate her desire for marital privacy, her insistence upon participation in decisions, and her right to question property arrangements with criminal behaviour. The play does not consistently maintain the distinction. Consequently, spectators may arrive at the easy conclusion that female autonomy destroys the family, whereas actual family breakdown also arises from the absence of marital dialogue, unequal labour, financial dependence, and unanswered expectations.

Although the faults of the male figures are dramatised, the final moral order returns largely to their side. Samīr's threats and contempt, Shobhan's severe comments, and Megheshwar's insistence on duty must also be discussed. Their affection is real, yet affection can suppress dissent when it assumes the language of entitlement. Sushīlā's generosity in forgiving deserves admiration; nevertheless, endurance should not be the only standard of women's virtue. How much right does a woman receive in this play to determine the ordinary terms of her own life? The question remains open after its emotional effects have subsided.

Here the critic's work is not to impose contemporary values on past characters as punishments, but to examine rationally the conflict of values embedded in the work. In a play published around 2003, the tension between the rural joint family and urban privacy is itself a document of social change. Shikhā voices the uncomfortable modernity of her time; by making her the character in whom faults are concentrated, the play articulates the audience's anxieties. In this sense Shikhā is not solely an individual woman but also an embodiment of collective fear in the face of social transition.

12. A Concrete Examination of Scenic Construction and Performability

In theatrical terms, the distance between the domestic room in Act I and Megheshwar's *dalān* forms a fundamental architectural element. The room carries the private language of marriage; the *dalān* carries the voices of collective decision-making. In Act II, waiting for letters in the urban flat and indirect news of illness in the village give effectiveness to events happening "offstage." In Act III the news of sickness and offers of financial assistance require a collective

presence. The playwright's directions specify bodily movement. If a director uses them in response to the rhythm of conflict rather than mechanically, dialogue-driven construction need not become the work's weakness.

Two difficulties are particularly important in performance. The first is the tempo of the letter's disclosure: how much information should spectators receive in advance, and for how long should Samīr's surprise be withheld? The second lies in the final scene: how can the crisis of self-destruction be given a terrifying dramatic force without becoming an extravagant spectacle? Balance is required among four elements—the experience of distress, Ritesh's humane intervention, the physician's composure, and Shikhā's remorse. The play's underlying ethical intention is to protect life; the arrangement of performance should accord with that intention.

Songs, music, and sound are not central compositional instruments in the original written play, although its performance particulars refer to musical arrangements. In traditional folk theatre, restrained sound can help establish the rhythm of entrances, changes of scene, and waiting. Excessively loud music may obscure dialogue whose primary work is argument, especially in the scenes concerning Megheshwar's illness, Ritesh's education, and Shikhā's rights. The measure of successful production should consequently be not the quantity of pathos but the intelligibility of dialogue and the credibility of relationships.

13. Creative Achievements and Critical Objections: An Overall Evaluation

The first achievement is the expression of rural–urban Mithila's social tensions through the ordinary conduct of figures who are not elite heroes. The second is the performable structure: few locations, limited objects, recognisable characters, a clear succession of scenes, and accessible dialogue. The third is the relation established between the family, economics, and communication: treatment for illness, the interception of letters, and a child's interrupted studies bring actual crises of resources into view. The fourth is its effective pathos: spectators are compelled to consider how far mutual pride and mistrust may carry a family.

Its most notable aesthetic strength resides in the dramatic testing of conduct as circumstances change. Samīr professes an obligation towards his family, yet his choices become troubled when a real crisis occurs. Shikhā insists upon the truth of her reasoning, but the act of obstruction destroys her credibility. Ritesh's education becomes not merely a hope for the future but a choice that must be made immediately. Rāmlāl's statement exposes the truth in public, yet the degree of his independence in giving it remains questionable. In all these respects the play has considerable power to represent problems.

The principal weakness is the moral linearity of its plot. The accumulation of almost all faults in Shikhā and her ultimate, abrupt transformation alike diminish the character's complexity. Structural problems such as the cost of treatment and disputes over property are resolved in the end through emotional

agreement, although in practice they require lasting arrangements. Long speeches, occasionally excessively punitive forms of address, and the speed of the final deliverance affect the play's credibility. These objections do not seek to dismiss its social sensibility, but to clarify the limits of its art.

In proportion to the title's extremity, the performance moves rather more towards familial instruction. This imbalance can be criticised on aesthetic grounds, but it also carries an important cultural sign: folk theatre at the time often offered audiences the hope of reconstruction at the end after exposing them to compassion and fear. Calling the drama a "happy ending" is therefore insufficient; it is a happy ending reached only after an approach to the threshold of tragedy. Its implications are both individual and social.

14. Conclusion: The Questions Remaining after the Crisis Is Averted

Dhadhāit Navakī Kaniyāk Lahās gives an important voice to that current of Maithili social drama in which family life itself becomes a stage for social reflection. The work portrays the disintegration of the joint family not merely as a single day's quarrel, but as a complex process shaped by education, the gap between city and village, poverty, the question of rights, illness, and broken communication. It does not fully resolve this complexity, yet the effort to bring it onstage has literary significance in its own right.

Through a character such as Shikhā the play makes explicit the collision between women's independent voices and the conventional moral order. Its solution rests more upon the character's repentance than upon just participation in society. Criticism must therefore continue asking questions of its representation of women, its economics, and its emotional politics. Such questioning does not diminish the work; rather, it increases its historical usefulness. Literature written in times of social transition often contains both the fears and the possibilities of its age.

Ultimately, the central truth of the drama is not death but the collective attempt to prevent it. The terror of the "corpse" is transformed at the last moment into an insistence upon life saved. Yet for that life to be genuinely dignified, it requires more than forgiveness: trust, shared decisions, fair economic responsibility, and the equal human standing of women and men. The work's most fruitful reading is possible only with these unresolved conditions in view: its familial happy ending should be taken not as the final answer but as the beginning of difficult questions concerning a new society.

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Chapter 05 · First Publication of the Play: 2005

Haṭhāt Parivartan: The Conflict between Military Valour, Familial Disintegration, and Dramatic Self-Recognition

An Extended Literary-Critical Study of Anand Kumar Jha's Play

Abstract

Anand Kumar Jha's *Haṭhāt Parivartan* ("Sudden Transformation") represents a tendency in modern Maithili social drama to raise questions of national duty, moral discipline, and collective identity from the stage of domestic tension. At its centre stands the household of the retired Brigadier Krishnachandra Pratap. The contrast between the prestige of military tradition and disciplined life on one side and the unruly, self-destructive behaviour of the younger son Giridhar on the other generates the plot's initial energy. The elder brother Gopal's military duty, Shālinī's marital suffering, Saraswatī's maternity, Rañjanī's insecurity, and the questioning of the child Rohan expand this opposition into an extensive family sensibility. In its latter half, through military sacrifice, Giridhar's absence from home, formal military communications, and his return, the play asks whether genuine transformation occurs only in a person's behaviour or also in the social perceptions through which relationships are constituted. Through close reading of the dramatic text, preface, performance information, scenic design, and dialogue, this study considers plot, character development, verbal acting, performability, the representation of women, the ideological limits of patriotism, and the dramatic conclusion. It argues that the work's effects arise from the combination of dialogue-driven popular theatre, familial pathos, and *vīra-rasa*; nevertheless, several abrupt leaps of plot, limited space for women's autonomy, and excessively explicit moral conclusions sometimes diminish its artistic complexity.

Keywords: Anand Kumar Jha; *Haṭhāt Parivartan*; Maithili drama; theatre; *vīra-rasa*; *karuṇa-rasa*; family; military life; women's experience; patriotism; character transformation.

Introduction: Social Realism and Public Theatre

To understand *Haṭhāt Parivartan* simply as the rehabilitation of a young man given to vice would reduce its fundamental creative tension. It begins with the clash between honoured ideals and actual conduct within the family, but finally demands reflection upon the relationship between nation, duty, sacrifice, and individual freedom. An appropriate method of reading must move beyond praising or condemning conduct and examine the familial expectations, social standards, and public languages that give it meaning. At first Giridhar is "spoilt"

in everyone's eyes; in the closing episodes that same young man's newly acquired military identity compels reconsideration of the earlier judgments.

The social background derives from familial experience in Mithila, but the action is located within a particular military household. Home accordingly ceases to be only a place of private happiness and suffering: every relationship is evaluated according to an imagined national moral discipline. The brigadier's rank, the historical symbols decorating the house, hereditary family pride, an elder son serving in the army, and the father's severe ethical expectations together establish a particular value system onstage. Within it the younger son's alcoholism, unruliness, wandering, and financial irresponsibility become not merely personal difficulties but a crisis of family honour.

The publication materials indicate that the play had been staged before it appeared in print. References to a Kolkata production, lists of the director and performers, and photographs associated with the staging are concrete signs of its public theatrical life. This is not only a drama to be read but one that has lived in performance. Its literary assessment must encompass the cadence of speech, scenic transitions, offstage action, ensemble acting, and possible audience responses. Publication and subsequent literary distinction are two separate events that indicate the work's social reception; the distinction itself cannot be accepted as automatic proof of artistic quality.

Historical Position and the Playwright's Creative Intention

The history of modern Maithili drama is not a narrative of uniform development. Its tradition is formed among literary plays, folk performance, the cultural stages of migrant cities, movements for linguistic identity, and attempts at social reform. Existing collections on the development of Maithili drama and the modern stage provide a basis for studying this many-sided background. New research raises questions about the tendency to restrict the "origin" or the "pioneer" of modern Maithili drama to a single name. It is therefore necessary to consider the contributions of performance spaces, printed texts, and marginalised social groups together when composing the history of modernity.

Anand Kumar Jha's *Haṭhāt Parivartan* occupies a particular position within this perspective. The playwright himself refers to works of social concern such as *Ṭākāk Mol*, *Kalah*, *Badalait Samāj*, and *Dhadhāit Navakī Kaniyāk Lahās*. These intertextual indications show that marriage, economic tension, the breakdown of family, and harmful social customs have been recurring subjects in his thinking about theatre. In the present play the same reformist impulse is joined to a military setting and the language of national duty. In one sense this is a creative attempt to move from domestic morality into public ethics.

Its principal challenge is that the moral message should emerge naturally from dramatic conversation, rather than replace drama with instruction. The author allows ample space for characters to articulate feelings, yet his intention frequently becomes more conspicuous than the characters' ordinary speech.

Several scenes consequently turn into definitive ethical pronouncements rather than dramatic debate or emotional confrontation. To call this merely a defect is also inadequate, for theatre written to awaken social consciousness has a long tradition of direct address. The question is where explicitness becomes effective and where it reduces the possibility of artistic ambiguity.

The Title's Meaning: A Sudden Event or a Prolonged Inner Conflict?

The title *Haṭhāt Parivartan* opens two interrelated meanings. The first is a sudden change of behaviour: the protagonist's conduct, direction of life, and public identity appear to alter unexpectedly. The second is a transformation in perception: the family that once regarded Giridhar as a source of shame eventually sees him as a source of pride. Whose transformation is more important—Giridhar's, the family's, or the spectator's? The drama's principal question inhabits this triangle.

From the outset Giridhar's disorderly conduct is a recurring source of concern. His mother's attempts at persuasion, his father's severity, his wife's distress, and the military ideal embodied in the next generation create a circle of moral pressure around him. At intervals guilt, self-defence, bitterness, and an inchoate wish to change can be discerned in Giridhar. It would therefore be unfair to the text to call the final transformation a "miracle" created from nothing. Yet the plot seldom gives the stages of this inner psychological process the depth that theatrical development might have afforded them. The "suddenness" of the title is consequently both a powerful surprise onstage and a structural limitation upon character development.

Remarkably, public evidence of Giridhar's transformation is established not in his own words but through a military officer's letter and the family's responses. Institutional recognition places its seal upon the private evidence of moral conduct. Those who had considered him untrustworthy accept him again upon hearing of awards, military rank, and national service. This sequence shows how far human relations depend upon public approval of reputation. The drama does not completely unfold the question, but the possibility makes its reading compelling.

Plot Structure: Two Acts, Scenic Units, and the Shape of the Climax

The play consists of two acts, with seven scenes in each. In Act I the conflict between family honour and Giridhar's disorganised life, the curiosity of young Rohan, satirical exchanges among friends, the instability of marriage, and the elder son Gopal's commitment to duty advance the story. Conflict sharpens through Act II: humiliation and resistance within the household, emotional rupture, military bereavement, Giridhar's departure, anticipation, and finally military achievement and reunion. The succession of scenes forms an intelligible movement from social disintegration towards renewed organisation.

At the opening of scenes, brief indications commonly establish the setting, time, mood, and circumstances of entrance. Darkness, offstage announcements, sudden arrivals, background music, and silence help to create an environment. Through these techniques spectators can grasp different rooms of the house, the passage of day and night, and indirect news from the battlefield. Yet important stages of the story occur offstage. In particular, we receive information about the results of Giridhar's military training, wartime experience, and gradual self-discipline rather than witnessing their development. This imbalance of "showing" and "telling" makes the climax emotionally powerful but sometimes remote from spontaneous plausibility.

The first scene's prologue is a formal announcement that establishes the historical glory of the Pratap family for spectators in advance. This has the advantage of making the conflict of values immediately clear; its limitation is that it restricts the space in which the audience might form independent moral judgments about the dramatic world. A military letter serves a similar function in the latter half, when an external authoritative document resolves doubts arising from dialogue, conflict, and events. Between these two framing devices the household remains the principal world of acting.

Krishnachandra Pratap: Military Discipline, Fatherhood, and the Crisis of Honour

Krishnachandra Pratap is the play's central ethical figure. His status as a retired brigadier is not simply biographical information but the foundation of his verbal manner, domestic discipline, and reactions. The firmness acquired in the army makes him demand corresponding discipline of his family. The elder son Gopal fulfils his expectations, whereas Giridhar disrupts that order. His father's anger is accordingly not ordinary parental dissatisfaction but the response of an ideal that feels dishonoured.

A contradiction operates within Krishnachandra's severe words. He seeks his son's ethical elevation, yet repeatedly weakens the human possibility of that transformation by humiliating him. In defending ideals he sometimes loses compassion. Although the playwright ultimately restores paternal affection and pride together, the intervening scenes show that this "dutiful father" is not invariably fair in his emotional conduct. This unexpected inconsistency gives Krishnachandra greater potential as a character than a simple idealised exemplar would possess.

Krishnachandra's patriotism is articulated through family pride. The memory of a son killed on the battlefield carries him from private grief towards an understanding of public sacrifice. He continually seeks to bridge individual sonship and military duty. Dignity belongs to this reconfiguration of suffering, but it also raises the question of the private right to grief: may a father weep for his child in his own manner, or does the language of national glory obscure his

sorrow? The play's pathos is more complex in this question than its heroic sentiment.

Giridhar: Unruliness, Humiliation, Decision, and a New Identity

Giridhar is the story's most changeable character. His drinking, incongruous singing, financial carelessness, and defiance of domestic discipline produce theatrical humour, but a crisis of self-respect lies beneath it. The more he is measured against expectations of family prestige, the more he tries to conceal failure behind arrogance. Aggressive rejoinders, demands for affection, a habit of feeling humiliated, and the desire for transformation coexist in his speech. To read him simply as a "young man of bad character" would obliterate an important dimension of the drama's psychology.

In conversation with friends Giridhar's life becomes a social spectacle. For some he is an object of satire, for others an opportunity, for still others a means of lowering the standing of the Pratap household. Both friendship and public reputation become suspect. Particularly when characters speak of "drama," "acting," "change," and one another's plans, the play hints at another play within itself. Different people impose their own stories upon Giridhar's personality; he struggles to change the role he occupies in his own life.

The final indications of Giridhar's entry into a military identity gain force in an atmosphere of familial bereavement and guilt. News of his new achievements comes through an official military letter; later his appearance onstage in a wounded condition gives the transformation bodily truth. This is not merely a change of rank: a body formerly associated with song, laughter, intoxication, and disgrace now signifies wounds, discipline, and responsibility. A literary assessment must nevertheless ask how much of the changed man's inward journey we witness and how much we accept through institutional narration. Dramatic credibility resides less in his final military success than in the earlier small signs of doubt, remorse, and self-respect.

A changed identity: military service and the family's act of recognition

Gopal: An Effective Presence Even in Absence

Gopal Pratap represents the ideal soldier-son. His sense of duty, familial affection, and conversation with Rohan bring the heroic sentiment home from military life. Within the household, the child's questions explain the distant meanings of soldiering. Through Gopal the father's pride is bound to personal love, while Giridhar's perceived failure appears all the sharper by contrast. Gopal is not the protagonist's rival but his continual ethical model.

Gopal's martyrdom marks the emotional turning point. The private crisis of a household suddenly enters the wider perspective of national mourning. Thereafter Giridhar's ethical question becomes more urgent: the family has lost one son in national defence; in what direction will the other son's life move? The author invests the episode with the sacred aura of sacrifice. Yet two emotional readings are possible: grief can give birth to courage, and grief can impose an unbearable pressure of imitation. The play privileges the first; criticism must also acknowledge the possibility of the second.

Gopal remains present principally through domestic dialogue and the consequences of news of death, not through a staged enactment of battle. Rather than display combat, the drama makes war visible on the faces of the family. This is an appropriate device for a theatre of limited resources. It also incurs a loss: the material complexity of warfare and the soldier's fear, doubt, and varied lived experience receive no direct theatrical presentation. Gopal remains predominantly an "ideal."

Saraswatī, Shālinī, and Rañjanī: Compassion, Resistance, and Women's Experience

The women are principal bearers of the drama's pathos, but their voices are not uniform. Saraswatī is the centre of maternal affection and mediation. For her Giridhar is not a criminal but a child gone astray. She tries to restrain the father's harsh decisions and undertakes the labour of keeping the family's emotional threads together. The ruthless language of social discipline is softened in mother–son conversation. The critical counterpoint is that the work of managing the consequences of men's anger and decisions is assigned largely to the mother.

Shālinī is the drama's most vulnerable and complex female figure. Within marriage she bears humiliation associated with her husband, an uncertain future, and the burden of her in-laws' prestige. She does not merely endure silently but speaks in bitterness, questioning, and resistance. In one scene she expresses the severity of her humiliation and suffering to the point where thoughts of self-destruction arise. It would be wrong to glorify this episode as the highest expression of a "sacredly devoted wife." It is an intense dramatic sign of marital inequality, psychological crisis, and the limited options available to a woman.

Rañjanī, Gopal's wife, reveals the private cost of military martyrdom. The sacrifice publicly honoured by the nation must be borne for the remainder of life by a woman within the family through labour, memory, and solitude. Rañjanī's distress, Rohan's future, and Saraswatī's bereavement challenge the formal language of military glory. In the end Giridhar's success appears to reorganise the family, but the long-term social and institutional questions of Shālinī's autonomous aspirations and Rañjanī's widowhood are not explored at length. Identifying this limit does not diminish the women's importance; it recognises the potential inward narratives left undeveloped.

Rohan: A Child's Perspective and the Ethical Education of War

Although a child, Rohan plays a decisive part in the drama's ideological structure. His simple questions bring adult formulations about military rank, duty, and morality down to the level of conversation. Through the child's questioning, courage becomes part of the language of everyday family life. If his

father's military career is a narrative subject for Rohan, his grandfather's honour is also a component of family identity.

The child's exchanges have another aspect. Opportunities for learning often turn into predetermined nationalist answers. His natural questions do not open sustained discussion of his independent fears, doubts, or the suffering of war. Rohan therefore sometimes resembles a character receiving ideal instruction more than a living child. Yet his humour, curiosity, and domestic affection soften the sternness of the predominantly heroic narrative. Without him its emotional range might have remained one-sided.

The Composition of Humour: Alcohol, Friendship, and Verbal Irony

Giridhar's ungainly songs, English-inflected modes of address, comic distortions of pronunciation, and the vernacular directness of Sanjendra create the early ease of performance. Small linguistic signs such as "Good morning," "Good night," and inflated self-praise allow spectators to see Giridhar's disordered life in humorous form. This humour performs two functions: it lightens the weight of social instruction and quickly marks the character's deterioration in visible terms.

There is a danger here. When a man dependent on alcohol becomes merely an object of laughter, his mental distress, dependency, and the difficulty of rehabilitation may disappear from view. In several places the play avoids this simplification by showing Giridhar's humiliation and inner contradictions, yet repeated comedy occasionally reduces his complexity. Some of Sanjendra's jokes make the household's bitterness more human, though the transition between humour and pathos is not always achieved with equal artistic restraint.

The exchanges among friends give humour a sharper social meaning. Joking becomes a politics of reputation: the instability of another family is made into a spectacle or treated as an opportunity for gain. Friendship's language contains signs of cunning, collective pressure, and a prurient curiosity about another's suffering. At this level humour is not only entertainment but can become an indirect criticism of society's moral decline.

Language and Verbal Performance: From Vernacular Maithili to Administrative English

The play's fundamental strength lies in its reliance upon dialogue. The vocabulary of kinship, rebuke, appeal, blessing, abuse, persuasion, and emotional invocation is close to living Maithili speech. Each character's cadence changes with circumstance: commands predominate in Krishnachandra's utterances, coaxing in Saraswatī's, wounded self-respect in Shālinī's questions, unruly fragmentation in Giridhar's, and simple inquiry in Rohan's. These distinctions give performers diverse opportunities for pitch, pacing, and pauses.

One distinctive use of language is the military officer's letter in English. The entry of a formal English document into the continuous flow of Maithili dialogue is more than a stylistic contrast: it signifies institutional authority. What the family cannot establish through individual affection or memory is accepted as certain truth through an official military letter. The language of rank, headquarters, military orders, and signatures imprints public authority upon private life. This contrast between domestic Maithili conversation and English military documentation may be read as a subtle example of postcolonial linguistic power.

Yet at the verbal level some long speeches bring the drama close to narrative exposition. Policy, history, national glory, and personal commentary are expressed together through a character's mouth in the same scene, affecting the spontaneity of realist dialogue. Particularly when a narrator's voice declares the conclusion in advance, the possibility of unexpected meaning arising between characters diminishes. At its most successful the play achieves its effects through brief exchanges, questions and responses, and silence; in didactic passages that effect seems lost in elaboration.

Theatrical Structure: Effective Simplicity and Difficulties of Scenic Composition

The opening scene is set in a family sitting room. The image of a particular military household, its furniture, decoration, portraits, and the characters' costumes provide a visual and symbolic background. Within this *āhārya* arrangement the opposition between past glory and present disintegration is evident. The restrained design facilitates performance. Since many scenes take place in rooms within the house, the expense of changes of location may remain low; darkness and offstage action can render scene transitions comparatively simple.

Rather than stage an actual battlefield, the play brings its effects into the home. Reports from the army, letters, and family reactions turn an immense national event into action on the domestic stage. This is useful from the standpoint of theatrical direction, especially where production resources are limited. The final entrance of a wounded man brings the play's reliance upon bodily acting to its climax: bandaging, fatigue, a trembling voice, and the family's responses together can make the scene moving.

Yet reliance upon announcement at every major turn restricts the stage's independent power. If spectators can experience characters' external appearance or family identity themselves, explaining their meaning beforehand through an announcer diminishes the discovery generated by acting. Such narrative entrances are not inappropriate to folk theatre, but their quantity and placement require particular care. The performability of *Haṭhāt Parivartan* lies in its scenic simplicity; its limitation lies in consigning momentous changes of life between scenes to reports rather than enacted events.

The Interplay of *Rasa*: Heroism, Compassion, and Humour

From the perspective of Indian dramatic theory, *vīra-rasa* is the principal intended sentiment of *Haṭhāt Parivartan*, but its effect remains incomplete without the cooperation of *karuṇa-rasa* and *hāsya-rasa*. Krishnachandra's family pride, Gopal's military duty, and Giridhar's final courage strengthen the enduring emotion of enthusiasm. Conversely, the mother's fear, Shālinī's anguish, Rañjanī's sorrow, and news of Gopal's death produce pathos. Giridhar's ungainly songs and Sanjendra's jokes introduce comic intervals into this grave atmosphere.

One point regarding *rasa* deserves particular emphasis: heroism is not inherently opposed to compassion. As sorrow deepens within the house, the public meaning of military valour becomes increasingly intense. Spectators feel Gopal's heroism not merely through his rank, but through his absence and the grief of those at home. Such emotional reciprocity is an aesthetic achievement. Yet in some episodes the play tends to close down compassion with a swift patriotic pronouncement, without allowing the natural uncertainty of grief to endure sufficiently.

Giridhar's body is especially important to the movement between humour and heroism. Initially his movements signify excess and lack of restraint; at the end his wounded soldier's body becomes proof of courage. The transformation of *rasa* is bound to a change in the body's significance. In such performance, bodily (*āṅgika*), verbal (*vācika*), and affective (*sāttvika*) means operate together. This potential is highly useful to a director; nevertheless, without restrained acting, some extreme emotional outbursts specified in the text may turn a moving scene into excessive sentimentality.

Patriotism, Terrorism, and Questions of Public Morality

The play establishes patriotism as an ethical ideal. The army, national defence, renunciation, uniform, and martyrdom become the highest exemplars of social value. Giridhar's new life receives full validation almost at the precise moment when his military contribution becomes publicly authenticated. National service thus provides a means for rebuilding individual self-respect. The entrance of national history into a household in Mithila makes the relationship between local society and the Indian nation an important subject of the drama.

A critical distinction is necessary here. Patriotism is the play's declared ideal; criticism of its dramatic representation does not constitute opposition to patriotism. The enemy or terrorist is generally portrayed as an unqualified evil force; political circumstances, the social cost of war, fear, and civilian experience do not emerge in depth. The moral boundary of conflict is accordingly readily intelligible, but much of the complexity of public reality remains undiscussed. The result is a forceful yet one-directional image of heroism.

The language of military glory is continually joined to that of hereditary family prestige. Honour tends to become a possession transmitted from father to son through caste and lineage. This raises a question: is service to the nation merely the restoration of a glorious family tradition, or the equal ethical possibility of every citizen? The play does not expand upon the question. A broader democratic reading could free courage from the privileges of lineage and relate it instead to human bravery, responsibility, and social justice.

The Invisible Limits of Class, Caste, and Family Prestige

Krishnachandra's home is surrounded by signs of wealth, education, military rank, and social respect. The family's economic and cultural position is not a silent background to the action, but an active resource: the loss of standing is so terrifying precisely because standing is already accumulated social capital. Giridhar's drinking and extravagance are criticised, yet the family's material security and social connections are not substantially questioned. The experience of loss, shame, and pride within this privileged class forms the work's central reality.

The broader history of Maithili theatre has also encompassed the experiences of lower classes, marginalised castes, and workers as literary subjects. Recent research on literary history stresses that the history of drama should not be written solely from celebrated authorial families and recognised cultural institutions. From this viewpoint *Haṭhāt Parivartan* raises a useful comparative question: with the prestige of a prosperous military family at the centre, where do the independent social worlds of the unnamed soldier of the same nation, the labouring family, the Dalit community, or the widowed woman appear? The play is effective within its chosen and limited narrative field; it would be excessive to call it representative of "society as a whole."

This criticism is not an invitation arbitrarily to accuse the work of omitting subjects it never set out to treat. Rather, recognising the limits of the social world that the text itself discloses is also a duty of criticism. The protagonists' problems are moral and familial, while the larger structures of economy, employment, and social exclusion remain secondary. Despite this restriction, a significant achievement is that the play does not automatically present a privileged household as happy and ideal; it reveals the conflicts within it.

Dramatic Evidence and the Transformation of Perspective

In the latter part, letter, announcement, and actual return are presented as three kinds of evidence. First comes news, which initiates a new judgment about Giridhar in the family's mind. Second comes the military officer's written communication, formally confirming his bravery and rank. Third is the living presence of the wounded Giridhar, through which the family sees the new truth with its own eyes. This sequence can be described in dramatic terms as a process

of disclosure or recognition: spectators' expectations and the characters' earlier assumptions are suddenly rearranged.

Nevertheless, this succession of evidence is uneven. Several extraordinary military achievements described in the letter do not occur onstage; the audience accepts them on trust in the communication. In a drama of social realism, brief scenes, recollections, episodes of training, or Giridhar's own narrative could have bridged the divide. The author concentrates more closely on the collective emotional result, and therefore reaches his decisive turn quickly with the assistance of external testimony. This artistic choice gives the climax theatrical elevation, but at a cost to psychological credibility.

The family's final acknowledgment also calls for critical attention. Earlier it has shown harshness in denying Giridhar a place at home; later news of military identity and valour makes everyone wish to embrace him. Does a person become worthy of respect only when a state institution certifies the fulfilment of duty? Or is a person who errs, attempts to change, and endures humiliation entitled to dignity even in an incomplete condition? The play does not explicitly raise the latter question, but its narrative itself reveals the limits of the former.

Artistic Achievements and Structural Weaknesses: An Integrated Appraisal

The first notable achievement of *Haṭhāt Parivartan* is that it gives concrete form to an abstract idea such as nationality through the conversation of domestic life, mealtimes, father–son disagreements, marital tensions, and a child's curiosity. Second is its performable scenic design: within the limited setting of a house, offstage action and changes of lighting create the impression of a much larger world of war. Third is the combination of humour, pathos, and heroism within one story. Fourth, with Shālinī and Saraswatī the ethical conflict is invested with an emotional value rooted in home life.

Its chief weakness is the uneven pace of artistic development. Giridhar's initial decline and the exchanges of family accusation occupy many scenes, whereas his military ascent and great achievements are reported comparatively swiftly. A second weakness is the declaratory language of a number of characters. Third, male-centred family prestige becomes more decisive than women's independent lives. Fourth, the enemy is represented in highly generalised terms, converting national conflict into an ethical binary without its historical and social complexities. Fifth, the restoration of self-respect through awards and rank leaves a question unresolved: what ought to be the relationship between humanity and social acceptance?

Raising such questions, however, does not declare the work ineffective. Its dramatic force is particularly evident for readers and spectators to whom home, military family, a son's future, and service to the country are living social experiences. The proper conclusion of literary criticism is neither unconditional glorification nor predetermined neglect. It is more accurate to read *Haṭhāt*

Parivartan as an effective, emotionally driven social and military drama, written for a public purpose, rich in possibilities for performance but marked by considerable simplification in its resolution.

Conclusion: The Ethics of Transformation and Drama's Enduring Question

The essential experience offered by Anand Kumar Jha's *Haṭhāt Parivartan* is not merely that a spoilt young man eventually reforms. It shows a change in the collective perspective of a family: the son once treated as an object of ridicule and shame is recognised as containing the potential for sacrifice, bravery, and renewed life. Formed through military glory, paternal expectation, maternal affection, marital suffering, and a child's questioning, the narrative makes transformation a combined question of personal experience and public recognition. Between Gopal's sacrifice and Giridhar's ultimate return, the drama translates familial suffering into the language of patriotism.

The aesthetic force of this transformation resides in the conjunction of pathos and heroism. Its ideological limitation is that democratic equality, women's autonomy, the multiple meanings of war, and the right of human beings to remain imperfect are not sufficiently developed. Performance emphasising subtler acting, pauses, and women's inward dialogue might turn its message into a more mature debate. The director's judgment can thus open theatrical possibilities beyond the limits of the printed book.

Within modern Maithili drama, the work matters through its attempt to join the immediacy of local language to the wider sentiment of nationality. Its achievement is not that all its questions have found final answers; it has brought tensions among family, ideals, love, humiliation, duty, and acceptance onto the public stage. Finally, the title survives as a question: what changes suddenly—life, the mind, social judgment, or everyone's way of seeing one another? The play's enduring literary significance is lodged within that unfinished inquiry.

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Chapter 06 · Play first published in 2017

The Dramaturgical Vision of *Mukti Yātrā*: Women's Identity, Institutional Power, and the Theatrical Grammar of Resistance

An Extended Critical Study of Anand Kumar Jha's Three-Act Maithili Play

Research Article | Literary Criticism | Maithili Drama

Abstract

Anand Kumar Jha's *Mukti Yātrā* (Journey towards Liberation) represents a current of modern Maithili dramatic writing in which a debate beginning with gender inequality within the family expands to encompass public organisation, the state's security apparatus, political conspiracy, and violence. Arranged in three acts, the play centres on Aarti Narayan, who argues for women's autonomy in decision-making, bodily sovereignty, the inequalities of marriage, and social responsibility. With the support of Bujaji and Malati Didi, a women's collective emerges as both an intellectual and an organisational space. In the latter part of the plot, however, the misuse of Aarti's name, abduction, a terrorist camp, and competing claims of state power introduce a fresh crisis into the struggle for liberation. This study examines the dramatic text through close reading, plot construction, character development, dialogue, stage directions, feminist criticism, and theatrical signs. Its central proposition is that the significance of *Mukti Yātrā* lies not merely in its affirmation of women's rights but in the more fundamental question: whose voice is authentic, and who is acting in whose name? At the same time, didactic dialogue, revelations dependent on coincidence, an implausible mechanical marvel, and a final resolution through violence disclose the play's artistic limitations. The work therefore demands consideration both for its achievements in social intervention and theatrical composition and for its aesthetic unevenness.

Keywords: Maithili drama; women's identity; resistance; women's collective; public sphere; political violence; theatrical signs; dramatic structure

1. Introduction: One Title, Several Levels of Liberation

At first sight, the title *Mukti Yātrā* suggests a single, progressive aspiration. Reading the play, however, makes clear that liberation has neither a fixed nor an exclusive definition here. Initially it concerns patriarchal marriage, social proprietorship over women's bodies, and familial dependence. In the middle section, it becomes a question of collective organisation, security, public dignity, and intellectual independence. Finally it turns into a struggle for release from the appropriation of one's name, identity, and trust, and from political violence. The word *yātrā*, or journey, gives this transformation its meaning: the sequence

of experience, resistance, and uncertainty matters more decisively than a predetermined destination.

An understanding of the circumstances of this work also benefits from attention to the playwright's earlier plays. Anand Kumar Jha understands himself as a dramatist who raises social questions. The prefatory materials to *Mukti Yātrā* discuss the tradition of social intervention in Maithili theatre, the relation between rural and urban performance cultures, and the playwright's responsibility to society. Yet the declarations of praise made in a preface are not identical with artistic accomplishment in the dramatic text. The proper task of criticism is to examine how far the play can embody its professed social aims through plot, character, action, and the language of performance.

The principal argument of the present study is that the play's most useful contribution is not a ready-made manifesto for women's emancipation. It is its transformation into a dramatic problem of the processes whereby an independent woman's voice is stolen, crimes are committed in her name, and her struggle is represented as treason against the country. To read the women's question separately from the question of power is therefore to obscure the work's internal complexity.

2. The Maithili Dramatic Tradition and the Work's Place within It

The history of Maithili theatre consists of several interconnected currents: Sanskrit dramaturgy, *kīrtaniyā* theatre, folk performance, and modern social drama. Song, storytelling, dialogue, humour, ritual movement, and communal participation have long been important to this tradition. To regard the emergence of modern Maithili drama merely as an imitation of Western dramatic forms would simplify that history. Its social language, the conflict between elite and popular cultures, and its changing forms of public life must also be considered. Recent studies of theatrical history likewise indicate that the question of Maithili drama concerns not only change within a literary genre but the cultural representation of language and region.

Within this plural tradition, *Mukti Yātrā* can be read as a modern social and political problem play. Its characters are not gods, kings, or mythological exemplars; they are educated women, activists, administrative officers, leaders of criminal organisations, children, and members of a collective society. Nevertheless, in adopting a contemporary political subject the play also draws upon singing, collective utterance, dramatic irony, and rapid changes of scene. In a sense, it attempts to bring the inherited aural life of community and contemporary public debate within a single theatrical design.

Criticism in Maithili must beware of declaring a play successful solely on the strength of its 'message'. A dramatic text differs from texts in other genres because its words acquire meaning through acting, silence, pause, objects, spatial distance, light, and the spectator's gaze. An evaluation of this play must

therefore move beyond moral agreement with its subject matter to examine stage action, the pressure exerted by oratory, and the work's contradictions.

3. Three-Act Structure: From Ideological Debate to the Exposure of Conspiracy

The first act opens with a dialogue between Aarti Narayan and Avadhesh. Aarti sets out her position on love, marriage, personal autonomy, and women's social destiny. Avadhesh becomes an interlocutor who opposes her ideas, a possible intimate companion, and an emotional rival. Her words sharply criticise the inequality generated by marriage, women's economic dependence, and the authority exercised by husbands and families over women's bodies. The intimate exchange between the two characters supplies the opening scene with its principal dramatic energy. Yet this energy is also at risk: instead of developing action, the characters repeatedly explain their positions in extended theoretical statements.

In the second scene, the intimacy of the home turns into public organisation. Bujaji and Malati Didi seek to give Aarti's ideas a collective form. The women's association becomes a forum for women's education, employment, self-reliance, security, and social participation. The arrival of Prabhav, who connects Aarti to her village, builds a bridge between personal affection and wider social responsibility. The scene establishes that a solitary declaration of independence is not enough: shared experience, organisation, and mutual assistance are necessary.

The second act exposes a crisis entering the sphere of social action. Through Dhananji, Chatur Chaupal, Padma Panki, and other figures, the play raises questions of state surveillance, security, information about crime, and public trust. Suspicions about the women's association, the misuse of Aarti's name, and accounts of abducted women suggest that other forces are at work to suppress or appropriate a campaign conducted in the name of liberation. The third act brings together the terrorist leader's conspiracy, the reversal of personal identities, the use of a mechanical device resembling an automated crow, the construction of a counterfeit enemy, and Aarti's final tragic fate. The development across the three acts is thematically coherent but uneven in dramatic credibility.

4. Aarti Narayan: From Bearer of an Idea to a Human Being in Conflict

Aarti is the central consciousness of the play. At the outset, she insists on making her own decisions, refuses to equate love with lifelong servitude, and expects respect and freedom within relations between women and men. Her presence is significant because she is not a passive recipient of moral instruction from a male character. She determines the direction, vocabulary, and framing of the dialogue herself. Rather than rejecting love, she questions the unequal structure of power

within it. This distinction matters: without it, her character risks being reduced to a heroine who merely 'opposes marriage'.

Aarti's ideological clarity gives her an active presence onstage, but it also creates an imbalance in her characterisation. In the earlier scenes she offers such methodically arranged social arguments that the effect is often closer to an intellectual essay than to spontaneous conversation. The finer textures of hesitation, indecision, self-contradiction, and private memory receive comparatively little attention. Aarti herself acknowledges that the price of independence is paid through society's gaze, suspicion, and humiliation. That admission offers a glimpse of her human loneliness. The play would have gained from giving this inner conflict more room.

A significant transformation overtakes Aarti in the latter half: the name of a woman seeking ownership of her own name and voice is misused by a criminal organisation. At this point her struggle changes from social disagreement into political conspiracy. At the climax, her bodily vulnerability, exposure to violence, and death insist that intellectual liberty and bodily protection are not separate struggles. Aarti's death leaves the 'liberation' of the title under a question mark: what kind of liberation is possible in a system unable to protect a voice of dissent?

5. Avadhesh: A Figure of Intimacy, Disguise, and Self-Displacement

Avadhesh initially appears as an opponent of Aarti's ideas and a possible emotional companion. In their exchanges in the first act, attraction, insecurity, and dissent mingle in his voice. Although he claims to understand Aarti's freedom, his responses also disclose a desire to possess and the shadow of social convention. The playwright could have made this tension a searching inquiry into the relation between women and men.

The final act reveals Avadhesh's wrongdoing, assumed identity, and links with a violent network. This reversal accelerates the plot, but the psychological bridge between his early personality and his eventual criminal form is insufficiently developed. The spectator is asked less to witness the inward process of a character's degeneration than to accept its results suddenly. Here the play's ideological requirements outweigh the psychological explanation of its narrative.

Nevertheless, Avadhesh's dissimulation is valuable at a figurative level. It gives concrete form to the suspicion that the language of love, morality, and social welfare can become a cover for criminal control. To treat this merely as the 'unmasking of a villain' would diminish the gravity of the implication. The larger question is how male authority neutralises the discourse of women's rights through agreeable words and apparently trustworthy forms of address.

6. Bujaji, Malati Didi, and Collective Female Subjectivity

Bujaji and Malati Didi carry the play's intellectual horizon beyond the dialogue of individuals. Bujaji represents organisational intelligence, public communication, and the leadership of a movement; Malati Didi strengthens its grounding in lived experience, feeling, and practical concern. If Aarti's principles are the initial point of thought, these figures are the agents through whom thought becomes public action. The play stresses that women's liberation is associated not only with private courage but with the courage to enter organised collective life.

The formation of the women's association is an important dramatic event. Gradually Aarti's private questions become the questions of everyone. However different their experiences, shared humiliation, insecurity, and the desire for rights bring the women together. This collective should not be regarded merely as a platform for celebrating the heroine. Its composition directs the play away from individual heroism towards an alternative public sphere. Bujaji and Malati Didi bring a plural form of women's agency into view.

A critical limitation appears here as well. Differences of caste, economic circumstances, occupation, and generation among the members of the women's association are not sufficiently delineated. 'Woman' becomes a generalised category within which the unequal experiences of domestic workers, landless women, widows, women with little schooling, and those from differing social backgrounds remain underrepresented. The collective is thus morally compelling but sociologically incomplete.

7. What 'Liberation' Means: Marriage, Labour, the Body, and Choice

The play's initial questions concern less the legitimacy of marriage as an institution than the inequalities within its practice. Aarti questions respect, freedom, and personal existence in the relationship between husband and wife. She resists treating women merely as instruments of reproduction, service, or family prestige. From this perspective, the play does not exempt the home from political criticism by calling it a private sphere: the balance of power within it is measured against the standards of public justice.

In the exchanges between Bujaji and Aarti, the demands for education, employment, administrative responsibility, self-reliance, and social participation broaden considerably. Liberation is understood not as simply keeping one's distance from men but as gaining the material means of deciding for oneself. Questions of institutions, associations, workplaces, and systems of protection consequently enter the narrative. This breadth is an achievement: the social effect of intellectual rights will remain limited if they exist under the constraints of economic dependence and physical fear.

Yet at certain points the play compresses all disputes between women and men into a single antagonistic framework. Although love, care, cohabitation, and partnership appear as questions at the beginning, their complex social possibilities rarely receive dramatic embodiment. The real critical question remains how liberation might create relationships in which mutual affection and individual freedom are not adversaries. The play leaves room for the reader's interpretation rather than supplying a settled answer.

8. The Theft of a Name and the Criminalisation of Resistance

The most original potential of *Mukti Yātrā* lies in its treatment of the misuse of names and identities. The plan to commit crimes under cover of Aarti's name and the women's association carries the play beyond the level of conventional social exhortation. 'Aarti' ceases here to designate only a person; it becomes a sign of public trust. Criminal power exploits the credibility of that sign for its own ends. When women who have suffered violence are themselves branded criminals, the linguistic act of naming becomes a technique of repression.

This reversal enables the reader to distinguish between the 'real Aarti' and the impersonation operating in her name. Its dramatic significance is considerable: repression is not simply a matter of physical force, but also of manipulating news, accusations, counterfeit reports, administrative recognition, and public confidence. If a movement for freedom cannot safeguard its own name, its intellectual labour can be appropriated by others. The play addresses this possibility of betrayal from within with considerable seriousness.

The episode has another, more problematic aspect. The story does not construct an extensive, coherent political sociology of the 'terrorists'; they are represented for the most part as embodiments of unqualified evil. Criminalisation is a complex process, but the background of the criminals remains relatively flat. In actual social life, the collision between false state accusations, internal disagreements within organisations, legal evidence, the media, and victims' testimony is considerably more intricate than the situation depicted here. The play should therefore be read as a warning about public mistrust rather than as a comprehensive representation of political reality.

9. The Voice of an Injured Woman: Testimony, Anger, and the Moral Centre

A collective voice: liberty, public trust, and the scrutiny of power

In the concluding part, the intervention of the 'injured woman' redirects the work's moral orientation. Intellectual discussion within the women's association had dominated the earlier scenes; now a body that has endured violence speaks for itself. She challenges the public confusion surrounding Aarti and Avadhesh, brings her experience of abduction and humiliation before the assembly, and questions the real identity of the accused. 'Evidence' consequently ceases to be confined to an official bureau or secret intelligence: the victim's own statement also becomes a decisive claimant to truth.

From the standpoint of feminist theatre criticism, this is a particularly significant moment. Had the woman who endured violence remained merely an object of pity, the story would once more have acquiesced in her silence. Instead, she speaks against the accusation, demands justice, and challenges the authority of powerful men. Here the play turns verbal resistance into moral action. Yet one must also ask whether her voice acquires continuity or serves merely as material

for the climactic plot. The work gives insufficient time to long-term rehabilitation, judicial procedure, and the social restoration of the victim's life.

This limitation deserves attention. If the experience of violence is used only to glorify a rescuer or the heroine's sacrifice, the victim's independent voice recedes into the background once again. The victim's speech makes a forceful entrance in this work, but the plural discourse of women's liberation would have gained in density had she been allowed greater scope to influence the play's final moral position.

10. The State, Police, and Security: A Moral Dilemma

Dhananji and Chatur Chaupal form the other pole of state authority in the play. On one side stand the ideas and experiences of the women's association and the trust invested in it by the public; on the other stand criminal investigation, legal suspicion, confidential intelligence, and the authority to use force. Dhananji should be read neither as a uniformly negative official nor as a wholly ideal one. In complicated circumstances he seeks proof, remains suspicious in some episodes, and eventually takes decisive initiative in matters of civilian security and the protection of human life.

There is an irony in state procedure: the very institution established to protect citizens may, through its accusations, suspicions, and circulation of information, also endanger their rights. Aarti's genuine identity, forged orders, the conspiracy operating in the name of a women's organisation, and misleading evidence underline this irony. Dhananji's investigation is clearly necessary; yet if the neutrality of law is demonstrated only through military intervention in the final moments, the more enduring problem of judicial process remains unanswered.

The relationship between the state and citizens' resistance is not a fixed antagonism in this play but an ongoing negotiation. Bujaji insists on rights, the authorities speak of preventing crime, and ultimately the positions of the security forces and the women's association partially converge. This outcome contains a possibility—that institutions might listen to the people—and a danger—that social transformation might be made entirely dependent on rescue by morally upright administrators.

11. Domestic Authority on the Public Stage: The Family's Double Face

An important achievement of the play is its persistent scrutiny of the disparity between the family's outward appearance and the character of its public actions. The language of social standing, motherhood and fatherhood, marriage, children, and honour can become a disguise for crime. Developments involving Mahamalik and Avadhesh reveal just such a discrepancy: the position of father is not itself proof of moral innocence. Within Aarti's world of personal affection and trust, the deep danger of impersonation finally comes into view.

The collective perspective of the women's association exposes this doubleness. Relationships pronounced natural, ordinary, respectable, or religiously sanctioned within the home are subjected to social inquiry that reveals their structures of power. Aarti's house becomes a place of deliberation: meetings, arguments, grievances, and proposals for organisation take place in familiar domestic rooms. The home is thereby transformed into a public sphere—an effective spatial conception in the playwright's theatrical design.

Nevertheless, the play does not probe deeply enough into the living circumstances that underlie this transformation for many characters. Its citizens frequently speak in a highly abstract political and ideological register. The small tasks of domestic work, cooking, income, illness, neighbourhood relations, caste power, geography, and everyday forms of social shame remain relatively scarce. As a result, the bridge between the reality of private life and public thought can sometimes appear excessively abrupt.

12. Prabhav: A Child's Vision, Memory, and the Play's Tragic Thread

Prabhav is a child character, but his function is not limited to evoking home and village or supplying tender scenes. His arrival connects Aarti's consciousness of freedom to the child's dependence, affection, and need for protection. His manner of address lacks the severity of ideological proclamation; it carries an immediate note of belonging and vulnerability. By the final scene, this child's perspective lends experiential significance to the story's political upheaval.

Prabhav approaches Aarti, whom he regards as a motherly figure, hoping to see her. As the plot advances towards violence, the child's cry of 'Mausi' ('Aunt') establishes a sharp contrast between the grandeur of an idea and the real cost of violence. This plaintive sound at the climax confronts the audience with a question: who must pay the price in innocent lives for the ultimate outcome of public principles, the institutions of the state, or conspiracy?

The scene succeeds in dramatic effect but is unsettling in its emotional implications. In elevating the symbolism of Aarti's sacrifice, the play leaves Prabhav's actual future uncertain. Had the final image lingered longer upon the child's loss and helplessness, spectators might have faced the incompleteness of women's emancipation more deeply.

13. Mahamalik, Kalim's Mother, and the Dramatic Conception of Violence

Mahamalik is the principal representative of criminal power. His orders, cunning, intimidation, and violent plans intensify the pressure at the climax. Kalim's mother constitutes a particular female presence in the world associated with him. That relationship indicates that the world of political violence does not consist exclusively of gun-bearing men. A woman may be a victim, an

accomplice, the bearer of kinship obligations, or someone trapped within criminal structures. An integrated portrayal of these conflicting positions could have provided a useful understanding of society's difficulties.

The limited intervention of Kalim's mother and the dominant role of Mahamalik expose weaknesses in the play's causal design. The reasons for crime, economic networks, ideological training, social exclusion, and political aims are analysed less fully than the incidents they produce. The 'wicked organisation' may function as an obstacle to the protagonist, but it never becomes a richly realised social presence. A drama that opens with a fine-grained debate on women's identity turns, in depicting the criminal organisation, towards the convenient conventions of the thriller.

The significant critical question here is not why the story contains criminals, but why its account of the social realities of crime remains so schematic. Had the motives and mutual contradictions of the final antagonists been dramatised, the play's vision of justice would have become more credible.

14. The Rhythm of Dialogue: Argument, Declaration, Emotion, and Silence

Mukti Yātrā is chiefly a dialogue-driven play. Characters answer one another's questions, oppose arguments, and propose fresh possibilities. The exchanges between Aarti and Avadhesh bring personal feeling into conflict with philosophical reasoning; the scenes involving Aarti, Bujaji, and Malati Didi introduce organisational thought; and episodes involving Dhananji and the criminal world reveal information and create suspense. These three rhythms give the play momentum.

Its chief weakness of dialogue nevertheless recurs: the different characters' voices frequently merge into the same argumentative syntax favoured by the playwright. Instead of clearly distinguishing their social registers, levels of education, emotional pace, and intentions, the characters tend to speak in an overarching declarative style. In particular, the case for women's autonomy becomes a series of long expository paragraphs. Onstage, such speeches may halt the natural movement of acting.

By contrast, the victim's plaintive voice in the final section, Prabhav's address 'Mausi', Aarti's fierce anger, and Dhananji's urgent instructions generate a new energy of pace and emotional confrontation. Here the author shows that he can move beyond 'ideas being stated' to the writing of 'action taking place'. The artistic lesson of the play is that when information, emotion, action, and silence come into relation, an idea itself acquires dramatic force.

15. Stage Directions and the Possibilities of Performance

The playwright clearly seeks shifts in theatrical atmosphere between the domestic setting of the first act, the social assembly of the second, and the

terror-laden location of the third. Directions for entrances and exits, movements of the hands, expressions of the eyes, the rise and fall of the curtain, the introduction of song, darkness, and distant voices provide readers and directors with cues for imagining the stage. The presence of performers of song recalls a tradition of communal sound; scenes of collective action unite images of folk celebration and the modern organisational rally.

From the perspective of theatrical semiotics, objects and sounds carry meaning here no less than words. Aarti's home signifies the private world; the women's association's meeting, a public claim; the prison-like terrorist camp, subjection; the military unit, the visible force of the state; and the artificial crow flying overhead, the clandestine control of information. Staging these signs could communicate the play's significance even in wordless moments.

The final part, however, presents difficult tests of theatrical practicability. Rapid shifts of place, the collective arrival of several groups, military action, an automatic device, sudden assaults, encirclement by groups, and a tragic death would be difficult to make credible in performance without carefully conceived staging. Quick transitions in lighting, shadow theatre, symbolic props, sound design, and suggestive acting could be appropriate to such scenes. A literal, realist reproduction of the stage directions would threaten both the economy of performance and the emotional truth of acting.

16. The Artificial Crow: Technology, Surveillance, and the Crisis of Knowledge

A distinctive theatrical sign in this play is the 'crow'. This is no ordinary bird: it enters the final turn of the plot as a modern, human-made device. Shown flying from Aarti's house, this artificial bird becomes a means of gathering information, conducting covert surveillance, and exposing criminal activity. Through the device, the play connects direct apprehension of truth with the problem of technological mediation. Who is watching, whom are they watching, and who determines what the observed material means? All these questions are condensed in the figure of the crow.

In Indian folk memory, crows are associated with news of visitors, omens, calls, and social awareness. The play turns this familiar bird into an instrument of modern secret observation. The transformation is meaningful: an ordinary form from the natural world becomes an instrument of knowledge extraction. The view from above expresses a particular aspiration towards power and truth. Yet the technology's operation, the limits of its capacities, and the evidentiary value of the information it gathers are sketched only briefly. The device comes closer to a magical solution than to a credible technological practice.

Here artistic opportunity and limitation are inseparable. The mystery would be more credible had the crow's flight been foreshadowed in the earlier acts, had the interpretation of what it witnessed been made contentious, and had it not assumed the role of an all-knowing instrument. In its present form, it supplies an

unexpected convenience for the final resolution. Its symbolic force is undeniable, but its place in the plot's causal and temporal logic is comparatively weak.

17. Violence, the Nation, and the Complex Relation to Women's Liberation

In the final act, words such as 'nation', 'defence of the country', 'terrorism', and 'women's liberation' converge within the same political tableau. Aarti distances herself from violent activities directed against the country; the objectives of the women's association emphasise social reform and just transformation. The narrative thereby draws a moral line: legitimate social resistance and violent criminality are not the same. The distinction is necessary because labelling an organised women's voice as criminal is itself a familiar strategy of repression.

Yet when the play brings the conflicts between public and private, woman and nation, human rights and police action together in a single violent climax, it loses some of the more complex possibilities of dialogue. Even while acknowledging the state's protective function, questions of state accountability, legal safeguards, and freedom of dissent require discussion in their own right. It is more critically productive to maintain the tension between the struggle for women's liberation and nationalist discourse than to assimilate the former wholly into the latter.

From this perspective, the play's most significant moment is Aarti's declaration that she is not opposed to her country; she opposes injustice and humiliation. Through it, the women's association defines the legal and moral limits of its struggle. The question remains, however, before whom and by what standards citizens should be required to prove their love of country. Keeping that question open is fruitful for a reflective reading of the work.

18. Dramatic Irony, Coincidence, and an Assessment of the Climax

Contradiction is created through dialogue in the opening part of the play and through the disclosure of conspiracy in the latter half. The audience gradually understands that the apparent public face of Aarti's campaign and the crime unfolding behind the scenes have a far from simple relationship. This construction produces suspense. At certain points, however, the playwright makes the announcement of plot information arrive faster than the characters' plausible access to knowledge would permit. The distinction between a character's own discovery and the playwright's delivery of information through that character becomes blurred.

Events such as the decisive unmasking of Avadhesh, the elaboration of Mahamalik's conspiracy, the sudden omniscience of the technological device, and the military's final arrival create a thrilling crescendo, but make causal coherence difficult to maintain. In a classical sense, narrative unity is not merely a sequence of events; it is the preparation in advance of the possibility of each

turn. Judged by this measure, the first two parts are relatively sound, whereas the third is excessively accelerated and melodramatic.

Nevertheless, it would be unjust to call the climax entirely unsuccessful. Aarti's death, Prabhav's cry, the women's resistance to criminal control, and the final silence produce a distinct experience of pathos. A play that initially seems to promise an uncomplicated celebration of the victory of 'liberation' concludes instead as an unfulfilled pledge. This contradiction in its emotional design protects the reader from facile optimism.

19. A Dialogue with Feminist Theories of Theatre

Reading *Mukti Yātrā* in the light of Elaine Aston's feminist thinking about theatre clarifies the necessity of representing a woman onstage not merely as an object to be observed, but as an active subject who sees and produces meaning. Through Aarti, Bujaji, Malati Didi, and the injured woman, the play makes a definite effort in this direction. Women's experiences are expressed in the characters' own language. Yet an equally important impression is that the playwright's ideas occasionally occupy the place of the women's autonomous speech. Distinguishing a woman's voice from the author's voice spoken through a woman is a necessary criterion of this study.

Comparison with Augusto Boal's conception of the theatre of the oppressed reveals that the play locates the possibility of opposition not in the protagonist's personal compassion but in the action of collective resistance. The formation of the women's association, the sharing of dialogue, and the demand for rights give it a participatory dimension. The work is nevertheless not a dramatic experiment based on such open participation; it has a predetermined narrative ending. It would therefore be incorrect to call it a direct instance of Boal's method. The comparison is useful, but the resemblance is incomplete.

Brecht's conception of critical distance provides another significant measure. The play's declarative dialogue encourages the audience to consider social causes, while the excitement and tragic resolution of the final act draw it towards emotional immersion. This contradiction should be understood not merely as a defect but as an aesthetic tension. Yet when emotional intensity obscures social causation, critical distance diminishes. The theatrical handling of the work therefore demands particular care.

20. Language: The Power of Maithili Dialogue and Unevenness of Style

The language of the play is the Maithili of public intellectual debate. Familiar forms of address within the household, emotionally charged kinship terms such as 'daughter' and 'Mausi', the vocabulary of 'rights' and 'security' used by the organisation, and administrative designations together create a mixed social linguistic field. The author does not hesitate to incorporate the terminology of contemporary life into Maithili dialogue. The reader consequently encounters

the administrative world of the town and the affectionate bonds of the village within a single language.

In literary style, this language has two contrary currents. One is unforced, relational, and emotionally affecting; the other is conceptual, syntactically prolonged, and declarative. The first joins readily with the actor's body and voice; the second can interrupt the rhythm of performance even as it clarifies ideas. The question of linguistic improvement here is not simply one of grammatical purity. The real measure of linguistic beauty is whether a particular utterance suits a particular speaker in a particular situation.

The distinctive speech, background, and age-specific intonation of the different characters could have been developed more fully. Prabhav's childlike language and the injured woman's constrained voice are especially effective. If, along similarly differentiated lines, Malati Didi's practical experience, Bujaji's organisational judgment, Dhananji's legal register, and Avadhesh's dissimulation had each acquired a distinct dramatic articulation, the variety of dialogue would have been considerably enriched.

21. Challenging the Title: Has the Journey Been Completed?

The last scene is not a celebration of victory for 'liberation'. Aarti loses her life amid terrible violence; Prabhav calls plaintively for the motherly Aarti; the social future of the women who have suffered remains uncertain; and although action to halt criminal activities begins, judicial proceedings and long-term reconstruction are left to the reader's imagination. A profound tragic irony thus emerges from within the title's hopeful structure of a 'journey to liberation'.

This irony admits several critical interpretations. First, liberation is never completed in a single event: the state's defeat of criminals is not conclusive proof of social justice. Second, transforming women's commitment into a myth of compulsory sacrifice is itself questionable, since such myths can relegate the everyday labour and prolonged resistance of living women to the background. Third, Aarti's death does not extinguish her ideas, but the play does not explain how the women's association will preserve her intellectual legacy in her absence.

Ultimately, the title is more pertinently read as an unfinished question: liberation for whom, by whom, through what means, and at what cost? The play does not answer these questions systematically, but its contradictions bring them urgently before the reader. Here its literary meaning exceeds the direct lessons periodically delivered by some of its characters.

22. Overall Evaluation: Achievements, Limitations, and Literary Significance

A central achievement of *Mukti Yātrā* is that it does not confine the question of women's identity to the four walls of the house. The struggle that begins with personal choice extends to the women's association, administration, criminal

networks, the nation, communication, and technological surveillance. Aarti's forthrightness, Bujaji's collective efforts, Malati Didi's practical help, the injured woman's testimony, and Prabhav's plaintive address create different emotional registers. The plot concerning the theft of a name and the criminalisation of resistance is especially thought-provoking.

Alongside these achievements, a number of limitations must be registered: repetition of ideas; the partial absence of individual voices; the one-dimensional moral portrayal of the criminals; insufficient recognition of social inequalities among women; the precipitate disclosure of important mysteries; the mechanical marvel of the automated crow; and the intensity of the violent final resolution. Such criticisms do not negate the work's social sympathies: they constitute a balanced examination of its dramatic truth.

Within the broader Maithili theatrical tradition, *Mukti Yātrā* is an ambitious social intervention seeking to transform private moral dialogue into civic and political discourse. Its artistic value lies not only in its pronouncements but also in its internal discomforts. Society fears the liberation for which Aarti argues; the voice of the people whom society claims to protect is made suspect; and justice cannot guarantee the safety of those it promises to defend until the final moment. Within this triangle the work acquires its greatest critical force.

In conclusion, it is fairer to acknowledge *Mukti Yātrā* not as an indisputably exemplary play but as an idea-driven, tragic, promising, and artistically uneven work shaped by the social anxieties of its age. Reading it opens a literary debate: genuine liberation for women lies beyond declarations, sacrifice, and the suppression of crime, in the construction of durable institutions of rights, equitable relationships, linguistic autonomy, and a safe public life.

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Part II

Nit Naval: Sandeep Kumar Safi

Part I / Autobiography

Testimony of Caste, Labour, Education, and Linguistic Self-Respect

An Extended Literary-Critical Study of the Autobiographical Section of Sandeep Kumar Safi's *Baiśākhme Dalānpar*

Independent Research Article | Maithili Literature, Dalit Life Writing, and Autobiographical Discourse

Abstract

The autobiographical section of Sandeep Kumar Safi's *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* can be read as an important early text of Dalit self-representation in Maithili. In it, an author from the Dhobi community recounts his family's insecure livelihood, payment for labour in grain, pressure to abandon schooling in childhood, labour migration to Nepal and several Indian cities, physical injury, failure in examinations, renewed efforts at education, and an intimate relationship with Maithili as a subject of study. The central proposition of this essay is that the historical value of this brief autobiography lies not merely in its claim to be a 'first', but in its first-person presentation of the complex relations among caste, class, labour, education, and linguistic self-respect. It critically examines the sequence of events in the source text, the construction of its narration, orality, bodily memory, the gendered distribution of labour within the family, and the silences of autobiography. Comparative theories of Dalit autobiographical aesthetics and testimonial life writing serve as auxiliary points of reference; no episodes of violence or other incidents absent from the original are imaginatively supplied. Ultimately, the work emerges less as a story of individual success than as a meaningful social document of continuing human effort against deprivation, precarious achievement, and the right to one's language.

Keywords

Maithili Dalit autobiography; Sandeep Kumar Safi; *Baiśākhme Dalānpar*; caste and labour; migration; education; bodily memory; self-testimony; linguistic identity; parallel literary history.

1. Introduction to the Study: The Literary Entry of 'I'

The first sentence of the autobiography characterises life as a struggle. Ordinarily, one might pass over such an opening as a conventional moral reflection; in Safi's writing, however, the declaration immediately acquires a

concrete social location. The 'I' is not an abstract human being but a child of Manhath village, from the Dhobi community, the eldest of four siblings, and the son of parents who supported the family by washing clothes. In this self-introduction, personal name and social position are inseparable. The author records the coexistence of two names, 'Sandeep' and 'Kiran': one identity at school and another in the village. This duality of names informs the reader from the outset that several social worlds impose their meanings upon an individual.

The question posed by this study is not how many scenes of suffering the writer presents. It is how experiences commonly regarded as ordinary—carrying clothes, grazing goats, cooking in a distant place of employment, returning to the village for examinations, and, more than anything, sending money to the family—become life testimony worthy of literature. The brevity of the autobiographical section is certainly a limitation of its scope, but it does not invalidate its social density. In assessing that density, the narrative evidence internal to the text is treated as primary, editorial claims about its historical position are considered separately, and comparative criticism provides assistance rather than substitutes for evidence.

2. The Book's Composition and Historical Position

The first edition of *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* was published by Shruti Prakashan, Delhi. The book is arranged in five parts: autobiography, poetry, *vihani kathā* (short-short narrative), short story, and points for reflection. This multigeneric composition is noteworthy. The decision to place autobiographical experience, verse, short fiction, and reflection within a single volume does not confine the author to one social identification or literary genre. Nevertheless, a critique of the first section cannot treat works in the remaining sections, not examined here, as evidence for the autobiography. They provide only the creative context of the complete book.

Immediately before the autobiography, Gajendra Thakur's editorial note describes the absence of Dalit autobiography in Maithili and presents Safi's writing as filling that gap. The editorial selection made by *Videha*, as well as available literary catalogues, also records the claim that this work is the 'first'. This evidence is important for the history of literary reception. To make 'first', however, a definitive bibliographical judgment would require a comprehensive survey of published, unpublished, periodical, and oral autobiographical writing in Maithili. Accordingly, this essay treats the expression as a historical claim supported by available editorial records, not as the final exclusion of every possible earlier work.

This caution is necessary to an assessment of the work. If a book is celebrated only for being 'first', its language, form, moral tensions, and weaknesses escape criticism. Conversely, if its brevity or unpolished manner is used to diminish it, the literary entry of a new body of social experience is obscured. Safi's autobiography must be read beyond both extremes.

3. Self-Identification: The Declaration of Caste and the Beginning of Self-Respect

The author writes explicitly: 'I belong to the Dhobi caste; I am Harijan (Dalit).' Here 'Dhobi' denotes both an inherited occupation and a caste. The simultaneous appearance of 'Harijan' and 'Dalit' shows the coexistence of names from different historical moments. It would be mistaken to treat 'Harijan' as the preferred term in present-day criticism. Within the original it is an act of self-naming inscribed in the language, experience, and conventions of its time. By identifying himself, the writer does not conceal the name of his community. In this sense, the autobiography's first decisive literary act is to claim the right to self-definition.

Immediately after introducing himself, he describes his parents' work washing clothes to support the family. In this sequence, personal identity arises from social labour. Caste is not merely a marker of lineage here but a structure of livelihood. The reader must nevertheless observe carefully that at this early point the author does not describe a particular incident of untouchability. To look for an explicit caste insult or an episode of denied temple entry and, failing to find it, to supply one imaginatively would be to betray the testimony of the original. A caste-linked occupation, a scarcity of resources, and unequal access to educational opportunities are in themselves worthy of analysis; imaginary scenes of humiliation are not required to establish their presence.

4. Wages Measured in Grain: An Intimate History of the Village Economy

One of the autobiography's most important passages identifies the form in which the family was paid for washing clothes. Sometimes the households they served gave paddy, sometimes flour, and sometimes potatoes; regular cash payment was absent. This small detail discloses older economic relations of service labour in the village. The value of work was determined not by an independently fixed monthly wage in a market but within the customer's means, custom, dominance, and reciprocal dependence. Payment in grain provided an immediate means of eating, but it also made the accumulation of money for savings, study, medical care, and travel difficult.

Safi does not describe the circumstances merely in the theoretical vocabulary of exploitation. He enumerates the goods received as wages. That material specificity has particular critical force: 'five seers of paddy', 'two kilograms of flour', or quantities of potatoes enable the reader to grasp the real exchange between labour and survival. The names of these foods and objects are not decorative tokens of local realism; they are indicators of a social economy. In an autobiography from a family belonging to the Dhobi community, these details connect the distinct discourses of caste and class. Caste may be read here as the historical pressure that determines the kind of labour performed, and class as the

daily consequences of inadequate resources. Their connection is not a formula to be assumed in advance; it emerges from the details of the original text.

The author also remarks that wages have risen when compared with earlier times. This memory does not indulge in an uncomplicated nostalgia for a wholly better past. Grain was comparatively cheaper in the earlier period, but earnings were inadequate; in the changed period, wages increased, but so did the costs and aspirations of living. Within this economics of memory, history is not the name of some great national event. It is written into the family's kitchen and the quantities received for work.

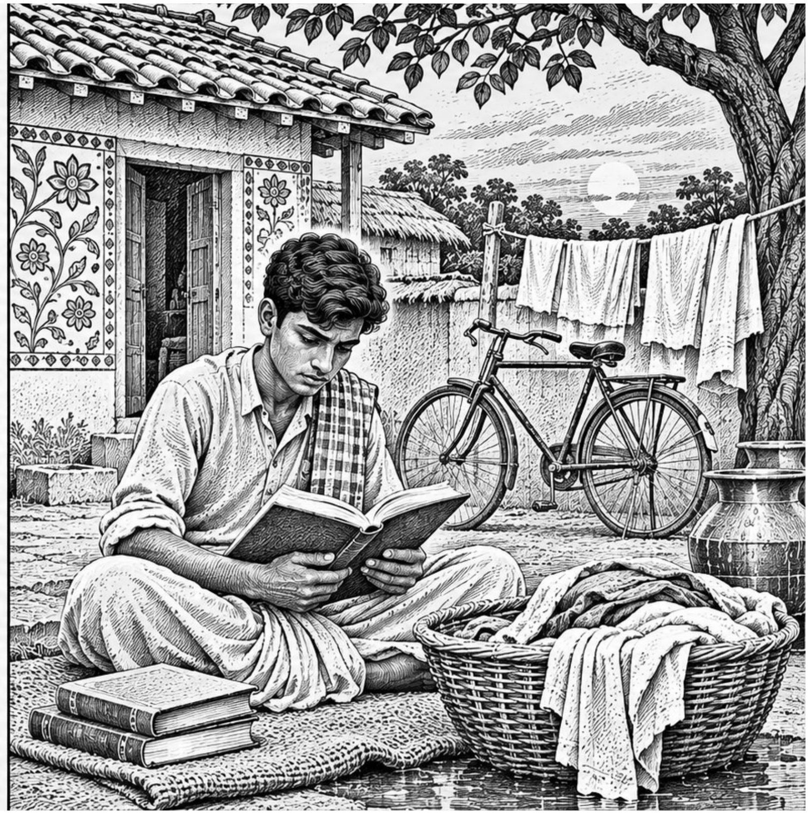
5. Parental Labour, Animal Husbandry, and the Invisible Economy of Dalit Women

In the autobiography, the mother buys a goat, raises it, and then sells it to obtain a heifer. This is not an incidental domestic detail but an attempt to diversify family income. The progression from goat to heifer embodies a woman's foresight, accumulation of resources, and calculation of risk. Service labour in the village sustains the family but offers insufficient security; animal husbandry thus becomes a hope of supplementary income. The author does not present this hope as a fulfilled success story. All that the text gives us is an account of the effort.

By referring to the joint labour of his parents, the author indicates the burden carried by the household economy, but he does not provide a separate account of his mother's feelings, illness, rest, or dissent. This gap matters critically. The woman is not merely a 'supporting character' in this narrative: she makes economic decisions. Nevertheless, the narrating centre remains the male 'I'. Women's labour is present, while women's own speech is relatively absent. Sharmila Rege's discussion of Dalit women's life writing offers a useful comparative framework for understanding this duality, but events specific to the other communities examined in Rege's work cannot be imposed on Safi's family.

The mother's attitude towards education later differs from that of the father. It would be a serious error to turn this difference into the moral accusation that 'the mother was against education'. Immediate livelihood and long-term schooling were both choices implicated in real family needs. Her wish to send the child to Bengaluru may have arisen not from indifference to his future but from immediate economic constraint. The critic may recognise that possibility as a hypothesis, not as an explicit statement of the author's intention.

6. Childhood: Time Divided between School and Work



Learning amid labour: the unfinished journey towards education

The author recalls that other village children went to school while he had to deliver people's clothes. The comparison is powerful because it reveals unequal daily lives within the same age group through the contrast between 'everyone else' and 'I'. The ringing school bell that signalled regular lessons for some children could, for him, mark time spent carrying garments or performing household work. Yet he learned arithmetic in the evening, spreading a sack upon the ground. Education thus moved beyond the institutional precincts of the school into courtyards, the company of relatives, and the leftover hours following labour.

The relationship between schooling and work cannot be dismissed simply as a story of 'personal determination'. Determination is certainly present, but the circumstances requiring it arise where a child's time is divided with the needs of the family's livelihood. The right to study and the obligation to work become competing demands. The father enrols the boy in school and asks the teacher to pay attention to him; the family's struggle is therefore not one-dimensional. Its desire for education collides with its economic necessities. To turn this collision

into a fault of character in any one family member would not constitute responsible criticism.

This portrayal of childhood raises a useful comparative question from contemporary studies of Dalit environments: does a child 'play' with nature, or does the child enter labour through fields, animals, and domestic resources? In Safi's writing, grazing animals, transporting clothes, and moving across the village are not scenes of idyllic childhood but matters of daily economic necessity. The autobiography does not, however, depict a specific caste-based prohibition concerning water sources or natural locations. It would therefore be improper to attribute any particular incident of 'environmental untouchability' to this text.

7. Migration to Nepal: Work Begins beyond the Family's Boundaries

In his earliest memories of adolescence, the author recounts being sent to Nepal. Leaving school, staying with relatives, washing and delivering clothes, and waking early to cook together present a picture of child labour and a cross-border rural network. 'Migration' here is not simply the modern dream of urban employment; it is an urgent extension of the family's means of subsistence. The place of work changes, but its nature does not become wholly detached from the inherited occupation. Village poverty accompanies the writer to Nepal.

In describing migration, the author does not deliver an extended argument about border politics or the idea of the nation. He concentrates on work at dawn, the stove, clothes, and the family's expenses. Such specificity is not in itself a weakness. From the migrant worker's perspective, geography is first a relation of daily labour and shelter, before it is a line drawn on a map. For the critic concerned with social history, however, the question remains why the author says nothing about conditions of work, wages, arrangements for re-entering school, and protections appropriate to his age. That silence must be preserved, not filled with imaginary answers.

There is also a small inconsistency in the chronology: the birth year does not correspond exactly to the age given for the migration to Nepal. Autobiographical memory sometimes organises events according to crises in a life rather than exact calculations of years. From the standpoint of research, the discrepancy should nevertheless be recorded. Correcting it without acknowledgment would alter the character of the source.

8. The Chandigarh Experience: Certificates, Mistrust, and the Urban Labour Market

After returning from Nepal and finding some opportunity to study, the writer again leaves his education and travels to the Punjab–Chandigarh region. His family hopes that an educated relative will help him secure employment. But without certificates, he cannot find work in offices. This episode brings the formal structure of modern employment into collision with earlier inequalities

of educational opportunity. A person whose schooling is repeatedly broken by poverty is again barred at the threshold of employment for lacking formal qualifications. This unequal cycle reveals the distance between 'working hard' and 'receiving an opportunity'.

At first, the ironing shop made available by his uncle offers a possibility. Soon, however, the absence of customers, pressure of rent, and suspicion about earnings make the relationship difficult. Kinship does not always guarantee security here. Relatives who provide a foothold away from home may themselves become sources of control and mistrust under economic stress. To call the episode merely a private dispute between uncle and nephew would be narrow; it is also a story of an insecure small enterprise, uncertain cash flow, and changing conditions of dependency.

The author subsequently works in a 'kothi', a substantial urban house. The word carries an important social resonance: the domestic space of a prosperous city family, and the worker's dependence within it. In places, however, the text supplies no specific evidence concerning the employer's caste, behaviour, contractual terms, or wages. It is consequently not possible to declare every moment of the relationship a definite instance of caste violence. Safi's credibility here lies in his limited, experience-centred narration. Critical credibility depends on respecting the same limitation.

9. The Injured Body: Labour, Medical Care, and Precarious Life

An incident in Chandigarh in which the author's foot is burned forms a poignant centre of the autobiography. The wound remains painful for a long time; he cycles some distance for treatment while using only one foot. The narrator's body is not merely a sentimental symbol of suffering but the shared location of livelihood, movement, medical care, and economic calculation. Injury obstructs earnings, treatment requires money, and lack of money forces him to reach more distant, cheaper medical services. Social insecurity is inscribed upon the body.

Where theories of autobiography have traditionally viewed self-consciousness as an inward experience, the materiality of the wound becomes a means of understanding the self in Safi's account. The memory of cycling 'with one foot' needs no elaborate dramatic ornament. A receptive reader can discern within that laborious movement the unequal confrontation between an individual and a social structure. His parents' anxiety and their appeal that he borrow money and return to the village connect the incident with familial solidarity.

To read the incident as a direct caste attack would contradict the evidence of the original, because the circumstances of the burn are not specified in that manner. The social questions of precarious labour and inadequate resources for treatment are, however, clear. Maintaining the distinction between the nature of the pain described and its social meaning separates criticism from unsupported advocacy.

10. Failure, Re-examination, and the Class Construction of 'Merit'

Failure in an examination is not the final defeat in this autobiography; it becomes the occasion for another attempt. The account of a friend filling in an examination form shows that entry into formal education requires social cooperation as well as individual effort. The writer openly acknowledges inadequate preparation in mathematics and Sanskrit, the interruptions to regular schooling, and disappointment at the result. This candour distinguishes the narrative from a self-congratulatory life history.

Later success in the Sanskrit Board examination, higher study after secondary education, renewed labour in cities, and repeated returns to the village to sit examinations do not form an effortless ladder of upward mobility. Educational opportunity comes in fragments. Time for study is found in the same household where the writer must perform domestic work for others. When the acquisition of qualifications is tied to household expenses, a sister's marriage, the raising of one's own children, and urban wage work, the ordinary distinction between passing and failing an examination cannot fully describe social inequality.

Even after acquiring an education, the failure to secure a stable appointment remains the author's final question. The text records unsuccessful attempts in examinations and recruitment for government or teaching positions, but this section does not furnish direct proof that the system necessarily rejected him on grounds of caste. The distinction must be explicit. The available evidence concerns insecure work, restricted resources, repeatedly interrupted education, and a vulnerable place in the labour market; these circumstances carry social and structural significance enough.

11. Marriage, Dowry, and the Moral Contradictions of Male Autobiography

The account of marriage brings an uncomfortable but necessary aspect of the autobiographer before the reader. He imagines that money received as dowry at his marriage might help accumulate enough to pay for his sister's wedding. The statement reveals the family's economic constraints, but also a moral system that depends on the transaction of marriage. Understanding poverty and treating the dowry system as beyond question are not the same. Economic deprivation may explain the historical circumstances of the writer's decision, but the gender inequality of the practice remains a legitimate subject for criticism.

This is a man's autobiographical account. His wife, sister, and mother are present within his struggle, but their desires and disagreements receive little separate expression. The sister's marriage appears primarily as an expense; the wife is visible within the family's economic and social arrangements, but her own voice is unheard. Comparison with Rege's account of Dalit women's testimony gives this silence a fuller significance. Even in writing the history of a Dalit man's suffering, women's labour and voices may be displaced. Recognising this does not invalidate Safi's experience; it clarifies the limits of its representation.

The continuation of schooling immediately after marriage complicates this moral tension further. The responsibility of establishing a family and the wish to continue studying are both active at the same time. The family is not an institution uniformly opposed to the author, but a contradictory assemblage of support, pressure, tradition, and love. This mixture is captured in his plain language, and criticism must not dissolve it into simplistic heroism.

12. Choosing Maithili: From Supportive Networks to an Intimate Linguistic Awakening

The decision to study Maithili at a higher level marks a decisive literary turn in the author's life. Hindi initially appears a possible subject on account of his interests or marks. Yet the happiness he experiences when a friend enrols him in Maithili is not merely a matter of curricular convenience. In this writing, the mother tongue passes from its small familiar world into the legitimate sphere of higher education. The friend's contribution is important: while the author is away from home, a friend in the village arranges the form and the fee. The making of the self here occurs through interdependent relationships.

The difficulty of obtaining Maithili books, and the attempt to collect reading materials at little cost, also demonstrate that affection for a language is not enough. Book distribution, affordability, and institutional availability matter. The author's graduation with a first-class result is a significant achievement in an educational journey deprived of resources, yet he cannot translate it into assured government employment. Education appears simultaneously as a means of freedom and an unfulfilled social promise.

The autobiography ends by expressing respect for the soil and water of Mithila and an ambition to bring Maithili to a position of greater recognition. A person formed through the experience of labour asserts a claim over the future of his language. 'I am a Maithil' is not simply a geographical identification here; it is a Dalit writer's declaration of his rightful share within society. The right to be Maithil is not determined by erudition, ancestry, or property, but constituted through participation in a common language and experience. The book's literary achievement is consequently not merely the telling of a life but the making of space for a new speaker within the world of Maithili expression.

13. Distant Work and the Village: A Cyclical Narrative of Movement

Nepal, Chandigarh, and Bengaluru all figure in the author's life, but their sequence is not an ordinary story of 'leaving the village to succeed in the city'. He returns to the village again and again—sometimes for treatment or examinations, sometimes for marriage, sometimes for further schooling. The pattern of movement is cyclical. The village is not a stable centre of livelihood but a centre of kinship, examinations, debt, marriage, and linguistic memory. The city is not a site of unqualified opportunity but a field of employment, injury, temporary jobs, and uncertainty.

The narrative organisation of time changes with the intensity of experience. Sometimes a whole year or an examination receives only a mention, while the routine of treating an injury is narrated in detail. The writer attempts to order the events of his life chronologically, but economic crisis occupies the greatest space. The chosen centres of the life story are thus determined by socioeconomic experience, not merely by the psychology of individual recollection.

For Safi, life away from home is no romantic modernity. It is the sphere of 'work', where subsistence is possible but the questions of language, home, and land do not disappear. In this sense, the autobiography of migration ultimately returns to the affirmation of the mother tongue and an identity rooted in Mithila. This return does not promise a physical homecoming to the village; it is a literary act of making a home in memory.

14. Narrative Language: Oral Rhythm, Unedited Experience, and the Question of Authenticity

Safi's prose does not rest upon elaborate figures of speech, philosophical quotations, or highly polished introspection. Its sentences advance by recounting events: 'after that', 'then', 'at that time', and 'but' link one episode to another. Through repetition and oral pacing, the autobiography sometimes acquires the voice of a person recounting memories aloud. At points, there is also an absence of careful arrangement between incidents. The critic's task is neither automatically to proclaim every linguistic irregularity a form of 'folk beauty' nor to condemn every sentence by the standards of formal prose. The question is which experiences the style can convey to the reader and which remain obscure because of it.

Repetition becomes an accumulation of experience. Washing clothes in one place, delivering them in another, then ironing them, then working in another household away from home: the recurrence of occupational continuity becomes a figure for social position. The plainness of the prose establishes a relatively direct relation of meaning with the reader, but simplicity is not the same as clarity. When an uncle's suspicions, the nature of employment, or the cause of an injury is incompletely explained, the reader is entitled to ask responsible questions. Such questions do not destroy the trustworthiness of the text; they define the limits of its documentary evidence.

In telling his 'self', the author repeatedly names people in the social world—friends, relatives, teachers, and parents. Their presence dismantles the myth of an entirely solitary self-making. Someone fills in a form, someone teaches letters, someone tries to find work, and someone advises a return to the village. The autobiographical 'I' is formed within a network of collective relationships. The testimonial voice derives particular strength from this relation.

15. Religion, Morality, and Self-Reliance: The Double Voice of the Ending

The author attributes his achievements in part to 'the grace of Bhagavati' and records an interest in devotional songs and *kīrtan*. A modern critic cannot immediately declare such religious and cultural affiliations contrary to an emancipatory identity. The faith of a working person is an actual dimension of social life. Work, education, the assistance of friends, and belief in God coexist in the author's experience. Acknowledging this complicated coexistence is a just response to the source.

Yet the closing section contains a profound irony. Immediately after recording the absence of stable employment despite a university degree, insufficient funds for his children's education, and life in poverty, the author affirms simple living, affection for Mithila, and a commitment to serving his mother tongue. This ending does not make an assured tale of 'victory'. Self-respect is taking shape, but economic security remains distant. On the literary plane, this incompletion should be recognised as the work's central truth. To attribute to the author the achievements he has not obtained and give his life a happy ending would reverse the ethical meaning of the autobiography.

16. Comparative Aesthetics of Dalit Autobiography

Sharankumar Limbale establishes the significance of lived experience, equality, identity, and social injustice in the assessment of Dalit literature. From this perspective, Safi's autobiography should not be judged by whether it offers the same degree of introspection as an upper-class life narrative. Its principal measure is how clearly a text reveals social relationships within a private life. By this measure, payment in grain, interrupted schooling, the insecurity of migration, and the acceptance of the mother tongue are significant accomplishments. Yet this criterion does not absolve incompleteness of narration from criticism.

In examining the testimonial character of Dalit autobiography, Pramod K. Nayar makes the relationship between personal life and community history a matter of textual analysis. Safi's account likewise permits an understanding of labour arrangements in a Dhobi household and the distribution of opportunities in rural society through an individual's experience. But one writer's life is not representative evidence for an entire community. His account is shaped by a particular locality, generation, family, educational network, and employment trajectory. Collective implications should be read while preserving that specificity.

It would be inappropriate to expect the same narrative pattern of overt humiliation, widely discussed in relation to Omprakash Valmiki and other Dalit autobiographies, to recur necessarily in every text. Explicit scenes of untouchability are relatively few in Safi's narrative; dependence upon labour and obstacles to education are prominent. Comparative criticism succeeds only when it identifies difference as well as similarity. Contemporary studies connect

autobiography with collective testimony, reclaimed self-respect, and the subtle violences of everyday life. Safi's text can be placed in that discourse, but no specific caste incident can be attributed to it without textual evidence.

A fundamental critical distinction emerges here: resistance does not always take the form of an emphatic declaration. Sometimes the continuing effort to obtain an education while publicly naming one's own caste, and the act of writing one's life in the mother tongue, are themselves interventions against social silence. Yet in the name of 'sympathy' it would also be wrong to establish the moral innocence of every action by the writer. Dalit autobiography is as entitled to criticism and self-criticism as any other writing.

17. The Silences of Autobiography: Evidence, Limits, and Responsible Reading

Safi's autobiography contains experiences of different kinds of employment, but many questions remain unspoken: the detailed terms of work contracts, working hours, caste interactions, fellow workers, urban housing, and the viewpoints of his wife and children. Several individuals are named, but their direct voices are seldom heard. These silences admit various possible explanations: brevity, the selection made by memory, the author's immediate purpose, the narrative skills available to him, and possible social inhibition. These are hypotheses, not conclusions established by the author.

Autobiographical truth does not mean that every incident has been fully verified through external documents. It concerns the coherent, testable social understanding formed from the narrator's experience. Discrepancies in chronology, moral complications surrounding marriage, and incomplete incidents are therefore not automatic proof of the text's lack of value; they require critical care. Conversely, concealing these limits to manufacture the image of an 'immaculate martyr' would destroy the complexity of the author's character.

Anger is relatively restrained in this autobiography, while the account of labour is exceptionally concrete. The author does not offer a theoretical manifesto. In interpreting his story, therefore, the critic must avoid the temptation to impose a political vocabulary of the critic's own upon it. The principal strength of the text is its credible, if brief, account of an insecure life.

18. Contribution to Mithila's Social and Literary History

The question of who speaks at the centre of literature and who appears only as a subject of representation repeatedly arises in writing the history of Maithili literature. In Safi's autobiography, a person from a socially disadvantaged community establishes for himself the meaning of his name, caste, labour, education, values, and aspirations. To attribute literary significance to this first-person presence is not merely to employ 'Dalit' as a term of praise. It is to broaden the source base of literary history.

The editorial introduction in *Videha* identifies the historical importance of this enlargement. Later critical writing also recognises Safi as an important early figure in Maithili Dalit autobiography. Here the recognition accorded by literary institutions and the independent value of the primary text must be considered separately. Editorial endorsement makes a work visible, but its lasting value is determined by examination of its structure of experience and verbal expression.

The text opens three particular questions for a history of Maithili literature. First, how far have life stories written by members of hereditary service-labour communities been collected and preserved? Second, what literary forms does the conflict between schooling and earning acquire? Third, how does writing in the mother tongue alter the map of social representation? Safi's autobiography does not answer these questions fully, but it does offer the primary testimony necessary for further research.

19. Conclusion: Literary Testimony to an Unfinished Struggle

To call the autobiographical section of *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* merely a poor man's tale of struggle would diminish its social depth. In the life of a young man from the Dhobi community, an inherited caste-linked occupation, wages in grain, interrupted childhood schooling, the risks of working away from home, an injured body, repeated examination attempts, complications of the dowry system, a scarcity of books, and education in Maithili form interconnected experiences. Through these connections the autobiography becomes a life record of a precariously situated working citizen of modern Mithila.

Its limits are equally clear: very restricted length, incomplete accounts of some incidents, inconsistency between years and ages, and relatively little representation of women's own speech. Critically acknowledging these limits does not diminish the book's historical importance; it makes its assessment more authentic. Safi does not bring his life to a point of definitive success, but he does find a voice in which to claim his language and land. When the 'I' of a Dalit worker recounts hardship, hope, and incomplete achievement in Maithili, literature does not merely gain new subjects; the answer to the question 'who may write literature?' changes. That changing answer is the central achievement of this autobiography.

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PART 2 / POETRY

From Conversations on the Dalān to the Contradictions of Society

An Extended Literary-Critical Study of the Poetry Section of Sandeep Kumar Safi's Baiśākhme Dalānpar

Independent Research Article | Maithili Folk Poetry, Dalit Aesthetics, and Social Criticism

Abstract

The poetry section of Sandeep Kumar Safi's *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* constructs a polyphonic world of twenty-eight poems by making the seemingly ordinary experiences of rural life its poetic subjects. Within this world, the changing seasons, drought, cold waves, ponds and wells, festivals and rituals, wedding processions, agricultural labour, domestic violence, dowry, intergenerational conflict, the neglect of older people, the cost of schooling, and rural consumer culture are interconnected. The central argument of the present study is that Safi's poetry is not merely an exercise in representing folk life or in humour and satire: its social significance emerges from the standpoint from which labour, deprivation, and the vernacular claim their rightful place in literature. Nevertheless, not every poem by a Dalit author becomes an identical manifesto of resistance. Some works reaffirm patriarchal conventions, generational moralism, and an idealised harmony of the older village, whereas others sharply expose the contradictions of women's domestic labour and dowry. Alongside a sequential close reading of all twenty-eight poems, this essay examines seasonal experience, rural public life, humour surrounding food, gender relations, Dalit aesthetics, dialogue, rhythm, and linguistic craftsmanship. In conclusion, Safi's poetry section enlarges the accepted repertoire of literary subjects. Its strength resides in concrete scenes and the living voices of everyday speech; its limitations lie in certain generalisations and an unevenness of artistic execution.

Keywords

Sandeep Kumar Safi; *Baiśākhme Dalānpar*; Maithili poetry; Dalit aesthetics; vernacular language; cultures of labour; dalān; seasonal cycle; environment; women's labour; dowry; social satire; rural modernity.

1. Introduction: The Right to Speak Poetry and the World of Labour

Whose lives become visible in literary history, and whose speech is heard? This is not merely a question of subject matter but also one of literary entitlement. Sandeep Kumar Safi's *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* is significant in this context. The

opening autobiographical section brings the author's Dalit life-experience into discussion; yet it would be a serious critical error to treat the poetry section as a mere supplement to the autobiography. Instead of depicting the private life of a single protagonist, the poems present an environment inhabited by numerous village speakers, mountainous heat, the absence of rain, communal meals, cawing crows, elderly parents, and women labouring in domestic courtyards.

Two extremes must be avoided in reading these verses. The first is to declare every vernacular expression or rural object automatically a work of superior art; the second is to dismiss such conversational verse as 'ordinary' when measured against the more Sanskritised discipline of literary Maithili. An adequate assessment of Safi's poetry must ask which scenes transform the reader through their objective sharpness; where a proverb becomes multidimensional satire; where social suffering acquires the concrete experience of a body; and where didacticism weighs more heavily than poetry.

Sharan Kumar Limbale's thinking on Dalit literature insists that experiential truth, social injustice, and questions of humanity be brought to the centre of criticism. There is no need to impose his arguments unchanged as a formula upon Safi's poems. What remains useful is the recognition that literariness consists not only in mastery of metre but also in the capacity to articulate human experience. Such a perspective does not terminate the examination of poetic form; on the contrary, it permits the relationship between social commitment and artistic construction to be questioned more precisely.

2. The Character of the Corpus: Not a Uniform Collection but a Sequence of Diverse Experiences

The book's poetry section begins with 'Bhakjognī' and concludes with 'Var Bikāy Laganme'. Counting the verses in their original order yields twenty-eight poems. This is more than a statistical observation: a movement of subject matter is discernible within the compositional sequence. First come darkness, drought, children's idleness, and dreams; in the middle are festivals, wedding processions, parental suffering, the division of property, domestic violence, the hollowness of social prestige, schools, animal husbandry, and old age; toward the end come seasonal festivals, water sources, images of the village, the dalān, service, and the structure of dowry. Through this progression the village in the poet's memory becomes by turns a place of celebration, a site of crisis, and a stage for satire.

The first-person 'I' occurs directly in many poems, but it would be wrong to assume that every such 'I' is the autobiographical author himself. The elderly accumulator of wealth in 'Maraitkhīn Rasgullā Khāeb', the person waiting for a daughter-in-law's care in 'Sevā', and the intergenerational moralist in 'Bāṛīk Paṭuā Tīt' occupy different narratorial positions. The dialogic form of the poems gives one author a multiplicity of voices. Humour, contempt, affection, anger, ignorance, experience, and resistance coexist in these voices.

The poems' social setting admits several meanings. Cracks in the fields signify suffering, yet a scene of card-playing in the dalān can also become a criticism of idleness. Women's labour inside the household receives recognition in one place, while in another the educated daughter-in-law becomes a symbol of moral crisis. To deny these collisions and turn the poems into the account of a single, uniform social message would be to conceal their actual complexity.

3. Darkness, Seasons, and Environmental Experience

In Safi's verse the seasons are not merely a backdrop. Drought affects rice, ponds, and living creatures; the cold of Māgh makes the body suffer; and the afternoons of Baiśākh alter the rhythms of both labour and leisure. Nature in these scenes is no ornamental garden but a force accompanying livelihood. This experience of the natural world, expressed through the language of folk description, distinguishes the poetic landscape from an urban consumer's viewpoint.

3.1. 'Bhakjognī': Flickering Light and the Communal Night

In 'Bhakjognī', darkness arrives before sound. The scene unfolds not through the majestic image of brilliant illumination but amid a flickering insect-light, barking dogs, the cries of jackals, an old man singing a *nirguṇ* hymn, and the restlessness of a small child. An everyday expression such as 'one cannot see even a hand's breadth' captures the night's deprivation of sight. The poem's sound-words construct an audible world; the reader does not merely see the darkness but hears it.

In this darkness there are both fear and the celebration of communal life. People calling to one another, children at play, the singing of *nirguṇ*, and the touch of the westerly wind upon the body form distinct points within one experience. The poet uses relatively few metaphors for nature; he makes the poem from concrete objects, sounds, and the warmth and chill of the air. For that reason, this opening poem demonstrates an art of creating an entire situation, rather than merely assembling words.

3.2. 'Raudī Bha Gel': Environmental Crisis and the Future of Food

In 'Raudī Bha Gel', the cracked fields, withered rice, drying ponds, the absence of vines, cattle longing for water, birds taking flight, and songs of Jaṭā-Jaṭin constitute different dimensions of a single environmental emergency. The earth 'opening its mouth' personifies hunger and thirst. The work is more than a prayer for rain: it expresses collective anxiety that the possibility of cultivation may disappear. The children's question, 'What will we grow this time?', links the drought to an impending crisis of food.

The poem offers no explicit theory of unequal access to resources within society. Yet through the loss of crops and the suffering of livestock, it discloses livelihood's fragile dependencies. The Jaṭā-Jaṭin songs and invocation of Indra are cultural responses grounded in folk belief; within the poem those responses

have proved ineffective. Their failure enables the reader to perceive the distance between the worship of nature and the farmer's actual helplessness. List-like descriptions of objects loosen the rhythm in some lines, but the very accumulation also establishes the breadth of the drought's impact.

3.3. 'Māghak Śītlaharī': Not Temperature but the Time of the Wounded Body

'Māghak Śītlaharī' articulates the experience of cold through extremely brief sentences, repeated exclamations, and bodily reactions. Reluctance to rise from bed, the equal helplessness of young and old, the 'san-san' sound of the westerly wind, numb hands and feet, and frost-stricken potato plants place the human body and the crop within the same crisis.

A comparison between 'Raudī Bha Gel' and this poem is important. In the former, the lack of water breaks open the earth; here, the cold and damp weather alter leaves, new shoots, and the human routine. In both poems, the meaning of weather extends into the local economy. The depiction of Māgh avoids elaborate adjectives, yet onomatopoeia and bodily sensation give the reader a tactile experience.

3.4. 'Basant Pañcamī': The Meeting of Nature, School, and Festival

'Basant Pañcamī' brings together Saraswati worship, students, yellow-green crops, mustard flowers, the fragrance of mahua and mango, the easterly breeze, and intimations of Holi. The season here encounters the school's cultural calendar. The festival is certainly a religious occasion, but the poem situates it within the delight of schoolchildren and the rhythms of village cultivation.

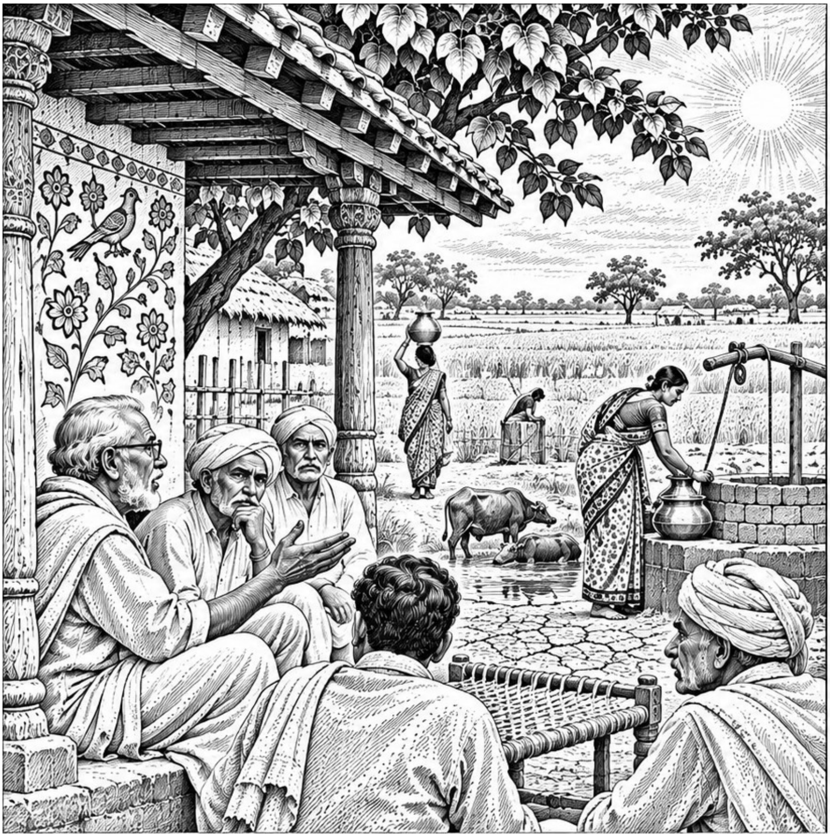
Internal tension is comparatively slight in this poem. Its scenes proceed in a harmonious order, and it closes upon social fellowship. On a critical appraisal, its limitation is that the resonance of celebration reduces the sharpness of crisis or questioning; its achievement is that the subtle, collective sensibility of seasonal life remains preserved in verdant imagery.

3.5. 'Baiśākhme Dalānpar': The Social Heat of the Title Poem

The title poem opens with an invitation to play cards. The confusion between the clock showing four and the feeling that it is only one accentuates time's slow passage in the heat. Plans to take the buffalo to bathe in the pond, an undershirt soaked with sweat, bedbugs in the cot, mosquitoes and flies, the easterly wind, and the cry of birds in a jamun tree create the actual texture of a Baiśākh afternoon. At its close the poem returns to the invitation to play cards; time seems to stand still within this circular structure.

Here the *dalān* means more than the front portion of a house. It is a place of public conversation where rest after work, companionship, and inactive time enter together. Yet this space privileges masculine sociability; women's labour in

the inner courtyard is absent. Read in relation to the collection's other, woman-centred poems, that absence raises questions about the social division between dalān and courtyard. The poet transforms allegedly idle talk into a minute record of season, animal life, and labour. The title consequently has the capacity to bind together the collection's entire social perspective.



The dalān and the divided spaces of village labour and sociability

4. Folk Belief, Festivals, and Private and Collective Aspirations

Safi's festival poems give precedence not to descriptions of scriptural prescriptions but to the visible and audible actions of home and courtyard. Pouring water upon someone's head, preparing offerings, the meeting of brothers and sisters, fairs, ritual bathing, and receiving guests create a community of memory. Folk customs, however, must not automatically be assumed egalitarian: questions of labour, gender, and access to resources remain present within them.

4.1. 'Sapnāme Dekhlahũ': The Clownish Image of a Dream

In this poem a stage upon a buffalo's back, a dance by Gopīcan, fair-like pleasures, drums, music, and sweets create a world of entertainment. Finally, waking in the morning, the narrator discovers himself lying upon a heap of dung, disclosing in an instant the distance between dream and reality.

The humour arises from the collision of two opposite places: the public stage of the imagination and the ground of the cattle-shed. Dung, though regarded as a 'low' substance, is not merely an object of disgust; it belongs to the everyday reality of the village. The poem's brief narrative turn operates with the skill of a folktale. It would be mistaken to treat the whole episode as autobiographical fact: it is the amusing dream of a dramatic speaker.

4.2. 'Kauā Kucaraie Pāhun Abaie': A Woman's Waiting and Domestic Preparation

This poem rests upon the folk belief that a crow's call is an auspicious sign of the arrival of a guest or beloved person. The waiting woman smears the courtyard floor, sweeps the doorway, imagines the meal, and expresses her delight at inviting relatives and neighbours. Her expectations of a sari, sandals, a purse, and sweets join the loved one's arrival to ordinary domestic desires.

The poem brings forward not the splendour of a festival but the simple desires of one's body and home. It would be reductive to read it merely as an immutable picture of 'female nature'. The expectation includes clothing, material things, and affection, but also a burden of work: the waiting person herself has to organise the entire meal. The poem's intimacy is created through precisely this invisible preparation.

4.3. 'Jūṛśītal': The Touch of Water and the Sequence of Generations

'Jūṛśītal' presents a public rite of water on a modest scale. Household members pouring cool water upon heads, meals of *sattu* and *pūrī*, remembrance of ancestors, drumstick leaves, small unripe mangoes, and worship together constitute a social experience of coolness amid the seasonal movement from spring toward summer.

What is striking is that water here functions not as a difficult resource indispensable for survival but as a medium of affection and blessing. Read alongside 'Raudī Bha Gel' and 'Gāmak Inār', this reveals three distinct literary forms of water: livelihood, ritual, and community. The poet enumerates festival objects, and the imagery retains freshness; what remains unasked is whether the labour and access that make such celebrations possible are equal across different households.

4.4. 'Kātikak Pūrṇimā': The Kamalā, the Fair, and Sāmā-Cakevā

With the current of the Kamalā, bathing at dawn, the fair, sugarcane, flattened rice, and the songs of Sāmā-Cakevā, this poem makes the river not merely a geographical watercourse but a form of communal time. It portrays the affection between brothers and sisters and the meeting place formed by the riverbank. Ecological-cultural studies of Sāmā-Cakevā also point toward the interrelationship between the avian world of the festival and gendered rituals; within this wider context, the poem's affection for birds and the river acquires fuller significance.

The poem remains largely upon the surface of the fair and festival; it does not examine in detail the resistance within women's songs or question patriarchal arrangements. Even so, the collective presence of 'mothers and sisters' moves beyond domestic limits and establishes a public sphere on the riverbank. That public sphere differs from the male circle of the *dalān*.

5. Humour, Feasting, and the Politics of Rural Consumption

Many of Safi's poems make the reader laugh first; when the laughter subsides, uncomfortable questions about tradition, ostentation, money, and kinship remain. The humour is not entertainment alone; a perspective of social evaluation lies within it. Yet its impact is strongest where linguistic exaggeration collides with some concrete object or circumstance of life.

5.1. 'Ābak Dulārū Beṭā': The Language of Generational Complaint

This poem portrays a child who does not study, rushes towards tobacco, demands new clothes, and evades school. Through mimicry, repetition, and local jibes, it voices a complaint about 'today's children'.

The reader must, however, recognise the speaker's bias. The elder generation's moral view of young people is not automatically a social fact. The poem depicts indiscipline, but it does not question other causes for a child's distance from school: resources, the standard of teaching, labour, or psychological condition. In the collection's autobiographical section, interruptions to education arise from economic necessity. The contrast generates a productive debate between poem and autobiography: not every refusal of schooling arises from idleness.

5.2. 'Āsaktiye Gaṅgā Dūr': Addiction, Inaction, and Fear in the Home

Through ridicule of cannabis, cards, the alleged lack of time even to bathe, and contempt for work, this poem draws a portrait of an addicted man. It also notices the frightened children in his household; addiction thus becomes not merely an individual habit but a crisis of the domestic environment.

The work approaches moral instruction, yet the character's contradiction brings it to life: the person who cannot find time to improve his bodily condition

spends entire days playing cards. The popular expression in the title, 'The Ganges becomes distant through addiction', creates satire through the idea that addiction renders even nearby things inaccessible. The poet is sensitive to the social problem of intoxication, but does not undertake a sustained examination of its socioeconomic causes.

5.3. 'Ek Ṭhām Gelahũ Bariyātī': Serving Food and the Humour of the Stomach

At the wedding feast, the sequence of soft drink, biscuits, tea, betel leaf, fritters, *pūrī*, fish, curd, and *rasgullā* keeps expanding. Food continues to be served even after the guest is full; exaggeration turns this disproportion into humour. Taking a tablet to aid digestion at the end converts the feast's splendour into irony.

The extended list of foods is also a sociology of local taste. Prestige at a feast becomes associated with the display of variety. The question 'How much food?' turns into a competition over 'How much honour?' The poem offers no direct comment on the unequal distribution of resources, yet the juxtaposition of abundant food and an uncomfortable body suggests a social distortion of consumption.

5.4. 'O Din Bisari Gelahī Rau': Memory and Counterfeit Renunciation

On seeing a friend with whom he played in childhood, the speaker exposes the irony of the friend's new ascetic persona. Memories of *kabaddi*, eating together, and an earlier friendship become evidence against present pretence. The poem's dramatic quality arises from direct address—'rau'—which conveys both the intimacy of friendship and a cutting rebuke.

The social criticism here is directed at religious ostentation, not at religion's wholesale rejection. The poem attacks the inconsistency between conduct and profession. It therefore belongs to the collection's humorous current whose concern is to see the truth of behaviour rather than be impressed by outward status.

5.5. 'Ghar Ūc̃ Ā Kān Buc': The Emptiness of Wealthy Prestige

An idea of prestige is constructed from the size of the house, the display of elephants and horses, sacks of grain, and terrifying dogs; at the same time, the lack of genuine hospitality and human goodwill is laid bare. The contrast between a 'lofty house' and 'closed ears' is as simple as a folktale, yet socially effective.

The satire is directed not at the mere ownership of property but at the tendency to regard it as proof of elevated conduct. The author's sympathies here appear to incline toward ordinary people. Nevertheless, the rich man becomes an almost

monochromatic villain rather than a psychologically complex person. The satire's immediate force is both its artistic advantage and its limitation.

5.6. 'Rasgullāk Jabār': The Communal Rhythm of Invitation

The repetition of 'I invite you' becomes a refrain in this poem. The speaker invites the villagers to eat *rasgullā*; the act of sharing sweets assumes the shape of a small communal festival. The poem does not depend on elaborate poetic ornament. Through the return of the voice and the naming of those addressed, it produces a performative folk melody before the reader.

'Ek Ṭhām Gelahũ Bariyātī' laughs at excessive eating, whereas this poem foregrounds the enthusiasm of sharing food. Read together, they clarify the dual value of feasting: ostentation and shared pleasure. The latter poem has little additional artistic tension; its effects chiefly reside in sung performance and communal address.

6. Family, Old Age, Land, and the Domestic Economy

The poems' familial world is not a sentimental, ideal village. Sons and daughters-in-law establish separate households; elderly people remain neglected; dividing fields becomes necessary; and small economic decisions clash with the family's sense of propriety. The desire for family unity overshadows many poems, but it would be unwise to accept that desire uncritically as social truth.

6.1. 'Bānarak Māyā Pũchpar': Affection and the Insecurity of Old Age

A folk comparison involving a monkey's attachment to its tail introduces the love parents bear their children. Following marriage, sons and daughters move apart, the division of property deepens familial distances, and elderly parents shed silent tears.

The poem makes its central sentiment clear: a lifetime of giving affection does not guarantee protection in old age. Yet the patriarchal ideal of the joint family is, to some extent, presupposed. A daughter's departure to her marital home, sons' quarrels over property, and the duty to care for parents are all roles open to questioning. The presentation of social suffering is effective, but the poem offers limited consideration of alternative family arrangements.

6.2. 'Pañcanāmā': From Sentiment to Documentary Rights

In 'Pañcanāmā', an elderly person speaks to his relatives of fields, residential plots, gardens, outbuildings, survey measurements, receipts, and written documents in order to prevent future disputes. Familial harmony is not merely sentimental advice; the demarcation and documentation of land form its practical dimension.

This poem is particularly significant because words such as *amīn* (land surveyor), receipt, *pañc* (community adjudicator), and measurement admit social institutions into folk poetry. Its material is neither palace nor pleasure garden, but a dispute over rights to land. Nevertheless, the moral call for 'documents for everyone' cannot automatically be described as a written declaration of gender equality: the poem does not explicitly state that daughters and sons should inherit equally. That silence invites social criticism.

6.3. 'Bāṛīk Paṭuā Tīt': The Education Market and the Older Generation's Predicament

In this poem a father mocks the new generation's expenditure and desire for urban schooling. His argument rests upon his own experience of studying beneath a *pīpal* tree while working in the fields, without sandals or a schoolbag. In the context of school privatisation, education becomes a business; the contrast between 'study in the village' and 'study in Madhubani' is a conflict between educational aspiration and economic means.

The poet grasps the problem, but the solution is less clear. When the older generation's hardships are turned into an ideal, the younger generation's aspiration to good-quality education may be unfairly dismissed. At stake in the father–son conflict is not simply extravagance: it also involves waning confidence in public education, the expense of private schools, and inequalities of opportunity. The poem consequently raises broader social questions than its didactic surface initially suggests.

6.4. 'Jatekke Bauh Nai Otekke Lahaṭhī': The Economic Arithmetic of Livestock

This poem constructs a dialogue between the wish to purchase a buffalo and the actual cost of keeping it. Milk, dung, fuel-cakes, hospitality to guests, and the prospect of a modest income come first; then the calculations of fodder, straw, bran, labour, and purchase price begin. The final decision not to buy the animal brings the difference between desire and means into humorous focus.

Here livestock is not merely an ornament of the village but a risky capital investment. The minute calculation of feed and the countless hours of labour expose the reality of the folk economy. The poem's moral is not merely 'abandon greed'; it also asks how difficult investment is for a family with limited means. The dialogue progresses from hope to hesitation: this is a successful narrative construction.

6.5. 'Man Lagale Rahi Gel': The Unfulfilled Dream of Modern Prosperity

Desires for land, a motorcar, a flat, a guard, a swimming pool, a business, and air travel accumulate one after another. This ascending inventory of possessions is

not a concrete statement of income, but the imaginative expansion of prosperity. The final suggestion is that all the splendour conceived in the mind remains unrealised.

The poem cannot simply be burdened with an outright condemnation of consumerism. A person emerging from deprivation dreams of a prosperous life; that dream has social legitimacy. The satire is directed less at the desire for things than at the boundless distance between fantasy and available means. Words such as 'flat', 'business', and 'swimming pool' indicate the entry of urban wealth as a symbol into rural life.

6.6. 'Maraitkhīn Rasgullā Khāeb': Property, Solitude, and the Failure of Care

Land, mango trees, a pond, oxen, and an abundance of grain initially mark a successful life. Yet the sons have separated, and the elderly person remains alone in the dalān. Night's darkness, mosquitoes, inadequate light, the lack of medicines, and waiting for footwear gradually overturn the narrative of prosperity. At the final moment, a son's question about eating *rasgullā* produces acerbic irony: the care desired throughout life has become a formal question about food at the moment of death.

The character of the *dalān* in this work reverses its character in the title poem. There it is a place of communal amusement; here it is the site of an elderly person's loneliness. The same architectural space contains both the honourable social assembly and the desolation of a dispossessed human being. This is one of the collection's most effective resonances. Here *rasgullā* functions not as a sweetmeat but as the belated emblem of misplaced affection.

7. Women's Bodies, Domestic Labour, and Patriarchal Contradictions

Gender is the most complex dimension of Safi's poetry section. On one hand, there are incisive questions about violence against the mother who labours in the home; on the other, an 'educated bride's' independent conduct is considered a decline from traditional ideals. Both voices are present in the same collection. Here criticism must not readily endorse instruction hostile to women merely because it appears in a valued representation of folk life. Sharmila Rege's discussion of Dalit women's writing raises questions about the intertwined experiences of labour, violence, caste, and gender. From this perspective, Safi's poems can also be examined through the social inequalities that they themselves contain.

7.1. 'Māraike Man Ta Sāgme Haradī Nai': A Trivial Pretext for Domestic Violence

The poem enumerates the labour of a woman who spends the day gathering grass and fodder, caring for children, cooking, and working in the courtyard. The man's inactivity, coupled with his expectation of good food, becomes a form of patriarchal privilege. The excuse for beating her is an error as insignificant as the absence of turmeric in a vegetable dish.

The poem's most effective feature is the disproportion between the supposed cause and the violence. The woman sustains the entire household, yet her labour remains invisible; even a seasoning worth a few coins can become the pretext for a man's violent assertion of authority. The work does more than arouse pity: it identifies the injustice of the division of labour. From a social and literary standpoint, this is an important woman-centred moment in Safi's writing. The simplicity of its diction does not diminish the gravity of its argument.

7.2. Rūsī's Departure for Her Parental Home: Abuse, Witchcraft Allegations, and the Panchayat

The voice of a woman driven from the home by domestic conflict, threatening to take her life before a train, subjected to the accusation of being a 'witch', and beaten is heard directly in this poem. Another character offers consolation; toward the close, the panchayat's intervention too becomes an object of satire.

The poem transforms domestic violence into a dialogic drama. The victim speaks for herself, and that is a significant achievement. Yet when the comforting voice says, 'Quarrels happen in every home', it risks normalising violence. Resistance and accommodation therefore coexist within the work. Rather than treating the allegation of witchcraft as a minor local quarrel, it must be recognised as a dangerous instrument of social control.

7.3. 'Sevā': How Far Does a Daughter-in-Law's Right to Her Labour Extend?

In the elderly speaker's voice, the desire to arrange his son's marriage arises chiefly from the expectation that the daughter-in-law will do the courtyard work and serve him. But the speaker becomes frightened upon hearing examples of the village's 'educated brides'. An educated woman rises late, refuses to observe the custom of veiling, and breaks the conventions of her marital home: such complaints supply the poem's concluding argument.

To call this poem simply a 'defence of tradition', without criticism, would be inadequate even for a discourse on Dalit literature. While 'Māraike Man...' expresses sympathy for women's indispensable labour, this poem fails to question the desire to regard a newly married woman as a source of unpaid domestic service. The speaker's standpoint need not be equated with the author's own

endorsement, but neither does the poem clearly repudiate that standpoint. This ethical contradiction is central to its critical assessment.

7.4. 'Bānarak Māyā…' and 'Kauā Kucaraie…': Two Different Social Images of Womanhood

In one poem the daughter departs for her husband's home and the story of family land revolves around sons; in another a woman decorates her home for the arrival of a loved one. Within the same collection woman appears in many forms: mother, sister, daughter-in-law, householder, and abused wife. Yet there is comparatively little independent development of her private aspirations.

Urmila Pawar's Dalit women's life-writing grants women the right to narrate their own labour and self-awareness. This comparative context makes clear that although Safi's poetry recognises women's work, women's experience is most often organised within a male narrator's moral framework. The difference deserves critical mention, while the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of the two literary texts must be maintained.

8. Education, the Younger Generation, and the Disappearing Communal Framework

Read alongside the author's autobiography, the poems on education reveal a striking contradiction. In the autobiography, financial constraints interrupt education; in the poems, young people are sometimes accused of laziness, luxury, or wasteful expenditure. One section raises questions directed against the social system, while the other emphasises the moral failings of a generation. This duality is evidence of the collection's compositional complexity, not an excuse simply to dismiss it as the author's weakness.

8.1. The Poem Beginning 'Ābak Chaurā Sab Baṛ Sukumār': An Ethic of Labour

Here an elderly speaker mocks modern fashions, smoking, motorcycles, the waste of gifts received from fathers, and distance from cultivation. He contrasts his own sixty years of work with the younger generation's idleness. The catalogue of objects reveals the transformed aspirations of consumer culture.

The satire's defensible meaning is not that all young people are equally lazy. Modern rural society faces multiple pressures involving the value of cultivation, opportunities for employment, and consumerist display. The poem's one-sided allocation of blame to a generation is its limitation. Nevertheless, it voices a legitimate anxiety about the weakening of practical ties to the fields.

8.2. 'Pañcanāmā' and 'Bāṛīk Paṭuā Tīt': Tradition, Documents, and Education

In 'Pañcanāmā', documents and receipts become instruments of lawful entitlement; in 'Bāṛīk Paṭuā Tīt', the private school becomes a costly market for knowledge. Modernity appears in two different forms: documentation can improve social arrangements, whereas marketised education may intensify inequality.

This comparison clarifies the collection's subtle understanding of modernity. The poet does not oppose every new thing; he experiences its usefulness or adverse effects according to circumstance. Registered title deeds offer hope of reducing familial disputes, while school fees exacerbate conflict between father and son. These differing examples suggest that the literary perspective derives from experiences of local utility rather than a single governing moral formula.

9. Communal Water, Ponds, and the Village's Changing Spaces

Water is a many-sided character in Safi's poetry. Its absence during drought, its touch during Jūṛśītal, the riverbank during Sāmā-Cakevā, the pond in which a buffalo bathes, and the well as a gathering place together make water a bridge between nature and society. The relationship between scarcity and social memory is particularly important within this comparison.

9.1. 'Gāmak Inār': From Public Water to the Private Tap

The poem remembers the old village well as a centre of meetings between women and men, collective water-drawing, and social intercourse. With the installation of taps in individual homes, such meetings became less frequent and the public site began to be neglected: this sense of loss dominates the work. 'Where has the water of the earthen pot gone?' condenses social memory and the transformation of water distribution into a single question.

Criticism must raise a necessary counterquestion. Access to taps at home can reduce the labour of women who formerly carried water from afar. The poem supplies no evidence that the public well was equally accessible to everyone. Its final memory of 'pure and impure' also gestures toward potentially exclusionary meanings within traditional systems of ritual purity. Village communality and the right to access water should therefore not be conflated. Between these two poles the poem contains some of its deepest possibilities for criticism.

9.2. 'Apan Gā̃v': Aesthetic Perception and the Rural Ideal

'Apan Gā̃v' brings together images of clean air, ponds and wells, cultivated mango trees, birds, a sugarcane mill, the scent of jaggery, wheat fields, and mutual hospitality. As the bond between nature and community is formed through scent, colour, and sound, the village becomes an ideal place of belonging.

Yet other poems in the same collection depict drought, patriarchal violence, hierarchy, the emptiness of prestige, and personal self-interest. 'Apan Gā̃v' does not negate them; it offers a poetic form of the village as one wishes it to be. The author's affection for his village cannot be taken as evidence that social conflict is absent. This poem is best understood as one affective configuration of a many-sided village.

10. Dowry, Marriage, and the Marketplace of Prestige

The poems on marriage bring Safi's social criticism into sharper relief. One depicts the humour of a wedding feast; another exposes the economic violence of marriage through the bride's family selling fields and the rising price of a groom. Read together, these poems reveal the conflict between celebration and transaction.

10.1. 'Var Bikāy Laganme': Not a Marriage Obligation but a Market Exchange

In this poem the groom's 'rate' rises, the bride's family sells fields, and even a boy who repeatedly fails examinations commands a price in the marriage market. A comparison such as 'the price rises like that of fish' presents marriage openly as a commodity transaction. The satire is especially sharp where the groom's family sets whatever price it wishes despite his lack of education.

The poem condemns dowry not merely through moral admonition; it adopts the vocabulary of the marketplace to expose the irony of the commodification of human relationships. However many conventions may be found in the preceding poems on gender, the criticism of the marriage institution here is unmistakable. The comparison shows that the collection accommodates progressive questioning and traditional expectations at the same time.

10.2. The Economics of Marriage: Feasting, Dowry, and Familial Desire

'Ek Ṭhām Gelahū Bariyātī' exaggerates the feast, 'Var Bikāy Laganme' gives the groom a market price, and 'Sevā' expresses the hope of securing unpaid domestic labour through marriage. These are three ways in which marriage operates as an economic institution: the display of prestige, the transfer of wealth, and the redistribution of domestic labour.

When the works are brought into relation, marriage ceases to be merely a ritual of affection; it becomes a point of convergence for family, property, society, and gender rights. The poems' overt humour does not conceal these difficult connections; it offers the reader a means of examining them.

11. Linguistic Construction: Vernacular Response and Narrative Rhythm

Safi's poetry relies upon the ways ordinary people speak. Forms of address such as 'rau', 'yau', 'gai', 'samadhi', and 'bābū' place the reader within social relationships. They are not merely local colour: through them one person claims an old acquaintance, another gains permission to mock, another requests help, and yet another expresses contempt. The right to speak shifts with the situation.

Free verse is the dominant formal principle in the collection. At some points there are attempts at rhyme, elsewhere dense repetition, the pattern of a folk tune, or the division of ordinary statements into poetic lines. For example, the repeated 'not dai chī' ('I invite you') yields a singable structure; 'san-san' becomes the sound of cold; 'jhau-jhau' evokes a dog's barking; 'kauā kucaraie' supplies the melody of an omen; and 'āu yau yār' gives voice to an invitation in the dalān. These sound-based constructions keep the practices of hearing alive even when the text has been written down.

At times the poet accumulates the names of objects over many lines. Descriptions of drought, the list of foods at a wedding feast, the dishes associated with festivals, and calculations of a buffalo's upkeep heighten the density of reality. But long enumerations also risk turning a poem into a collection of descriptions. Diversity of language is therefore insufficient for an assessment of craft: one must examine new turns of meaning, the organisation of sound, and the force of endings. 'Sapnāme Deklahũ' and 'Maraitkhīn Rasgullā Khāeb' have relatively concentrated final reversals; the scenes of 'Basant Pañcamī' and 'Apan Gā̃v' are more static.

One distinguishing feature of Safi's style is its prose-like construction. Vernacular conversations become verse lines: in some places this gives them dramatic vitality; elsewhere it blurs the boundary between poetry and ordinary talk. The blurred boundary is not in itself a fault, but the success of each poem requires independent examination.

12. The Dalān: Public Life, Solitude, and Social Perspective

The *dalān* of the book's title is a key to rereading the entire poetry section. In 'Baiśākhme Dalānpar', friends are invited to spend their leisure playing games; in 'Maraitkhīn Rasgullā Khāeb', the dalān becomes an elderly person's lonely dwelling; in 'Āsaktiye Gaṅgā Dūr', an addicted man moves from one dalān to another; and in 'O Din Bisari Gelahī Rau', the dalān is a dramatic place where an old acquaintance is re-established. The meaning of a single social space changes with circumstance.

The dalān is therefore not simply a 'traditional communal square'. It may also be a male-dominated assembly, while women labour continuously in the courtyard within. It is a centre of discussion but not necessarily free of social exclusion. It

shelters the elderly, yet can signify their neglect. In these contradictions of one location lies an independent source of the collection's literary richness.

Comparison with 'Gāmak Inār' gives public life a double character. The well is a meeting place constructed through the common labour of fetching water; the dalān is a place of rest and conversation. There is no evidence that both were equally open to everyone. Attention to this distinction protects the reader against romanticising folk life and makes a more precise understanding of the poetry's cultural geography possible.

13. A Dalit Literary Perspective: The Author's Social Position and the Autonomy of Poetry

Safi's autobiography describes the Dhobi caste, the service labour of his family, the burden of childhood work, interrupted schooling, and migration. Such testimony provides not an inference about the author's social position but his direct self-identification. Yet assuming that every character in the poetry section belongs to the Dhobi community, or attributing every domestic problem directly to untouchability, would exceed the evidence. Sometimes a poem speaks through an independent folk character, sometimes through collective observation.

To employ Dalit aesthetics here is not to restrict the author to a predetermined political mould but to acknowledge his right to his experience. A poet from a Dhobi family may write about Mithila's seasons, festivals, food, social humour, and religious feeling: his literary entitlement is not confined to descriptions of suffering. Conversely, to assume that every line by a writer of Dalit background necessarily criticises social injustice would itself impose a kind of literary constraint.

The anthology of modern Marathi Dalit literature edited by Arjun Dangle demonstrates the breadth of Dalit expression in poetry, fiction, and autobiography. Eleanor Zelliot's studies illuminate the historical relationship between social movements and the literary articulation of the self. Within this comparative frame, Safi's poetry is a regional expression grounded in folk speech, not an unchanged repetition of the Marathi Dalit movement's forms and political vocabulary. Preserving differences of period, language, literary institutions, and authorial experience is an essential condition of comparison.

The editorial claim concerning the 'first Dalit autobiography in Maithili' pertains to the literary history of Safi's prose section. It would be inappropriate on that basis to designate the poetry section as the 'first collection of Dalit poetry'. The book's principal historical significance lies in the coexistence of five genres, the enlargement of social representation, and the claim of contemporary vernacular expression to a place in printed literature.

14. Contradictions of the Text and Critical Limitations

Certain scenes in these works undoubtedly possess force, but critical appraisal brings the following contradictions into focus. A poem against domestic violence appears in the same collection as a voice that wants a daughter-in-law for domestic service. 'Gāmak Inār' recalls communal solidarity but does not openly examine the potentially exclusionary social meaning of old distinctions between 'pure' and 'impure'. The costly structures of schooling are questioned, yet there is also a tendency to dismiss the new generation's educational aspirations as indulgence. The marriage market is sharply ridiculed, but the desire to obtain domestic labour through marriage is also expressed.

A work is not invalidated merely because the moral limits of its author's time can be discerned within it. Rather, making those limits explicit renders the text more alive. Safi's poetry frequently constructs the binary of the 'good people of the old village' against the 'degenerate generation of today'. Consequently, an initially sociological observation becomes a moral generalisation. The inventiveness of some poems is concentrated in audible repetition and folk imagery, whereas in others repeated sentences, direct instruction, or sequential lists diminish poetic energy.

An achievement contrary to these limitations is also noteworthy. In this book, the water of the village well, a buffalo's costs, potato crops, *rasgullā*, turmeric, fish, earthen pitchers, straw, verse lines, cooking, and bedbugs become literary subjects. These objects carry the meanings of labour and life. The dignity bestowed upon such supposedly 'ordinary' things extends poetry's social field. This enlargement is a genuine poetic accomplishment; a balanced review must recognise it while acknowledging formal irregularities and ethical contradictions.

15. Comparative Conclusion: The Triangle of Season, Food, and Labour

Many of the poems can be read together along three axes. The first is season: drought, the chill of Māgh, spring, and the heat of Baiśākh. The second is food: *sattu* at Jūṛśītal, wedding feasts, *rasgullā*, fish, and the yield of old fields. The third is labour: cultivation, animal husbandry, cooking, childcare, drawing water, working the sugarcane press, and caring for older people. The triangle constructs a wider account of livelihood. Seasons alter the conditions of labour; labour creates the possibility of food; and food becomes a marker of relationships and prestige.

'Raudī Bha Gel' threatens the future of grain, while 'Ek Ṭhām Gelahū Bariyātī' depicts consumption exceeding the limits of appetite. 'Jatekke Bauh Nai Otekke Lahaṭhī' calculates the economics of milk, while 'Rasgullāk Jabār' presents sweets as a communal gift. In 'Māraike Man Ta Sāgme Haradī Nai', preparing food is a form of women's relentless labour; in 'Maraitkhīn Rasgullā Khāeb',

offering food marks the failure of a relationship. In these different contexts, foods are not merely objects of taste but patterns of social relation.

Within this triangle, the achievement of the poetry section becomes intelligible. Mithila here is not merely Mithila of festivals: it is also Mithila of drought, hunger, labour, consumption, patriarchy, and resistance. Its ability to perceive different meanings within the same geography takes the collection beyond documentary importance and gives it literary plurality.

16. Conclusion: Society's Unfinished Debate in Vernacular Poetry

To describe the poetry section of *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* simply as village songs would undervalue its social argument. To make every poem a manifesto against caste would erase its particular emotions, uncertainties, and contradictions. These twenty-eight poems contain seasons and festivals, but equally family, property, labour, schooling, water, consumption, and violence. Through vernacular dialogue, the poet establishes the literary rights of everyday life.

Three particular achievements emerge from an overall assessment. First, a wealth of vividly observed things: the cracks of drought, buffalo fodder, the rope of a well, an elderly person's dying oil-lamp, and turmeric in the kitchen. Second, an aural and narrative arrangement: terms of address, laughter, conversation, repetition, and sudden endings. Third, the power to raise social questions: the dowry market, domestic violence, the disappearance of public resources, the insecurity of old age, and costly schooling.

Alongside these achievements stand clear limitations of an early creative practice: didactic intrusions into certain poems, a monochromatic morality in some speakers, contradictory views of women's autonomy, and uneven organisation of metre and rhythm. Yet the task of literary criticism is not merely to compile a list of defects. It must also see how a work grasps the unspoken questions of its time. By this measure Safi's poetry section is notable. Its dalān becomes at different moments a meeting place for conversation, an elderly person's solitude, a circuit of intoxication, and a square of memory. Within this changing dalān, the lives of Mithila's ordinary people do not remain homogeneous: they enter literature with their unfinished debate.

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PART 3 / SHORT-SHORT STORIES

Folk Belief, Domestic Life, and the Marriage Market

An Extended Literary-Critical Study of the Short-Short Story Section of Sandeep Kumar Safi's Baiśākhme Dalānpar

Independent Research Article | Maithili Narratology and Social Criticism

Abstract

The short-short story section of Sandeep Kumar Safi's *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* consists of three dialogue-driven stories—'Andh Viśvās', 'Sāus Putohu', and 'Sagun'. Despite their brevity, they reveal three interconnected crises of Mithila's domestic and social life: attacks upon a woman's reputation through rumour and accusations of witchcraft; the unequal distribution of women's domestic labour and the violence of household authority; and the normalised monetary transactions of dowry in the name of marriage. The present study does not read these stories merely as didactic pieces of social writing. It examines how vernacular dialogue, unvoiced characters, changes of scene, pauses, the suggestiveness of titles, and unresolved conclusions generate narrative meaning. Its three major observations concern the emergence of social slander in a conversation between two speakers in 'Andh Viśvās'; the invisible but influential presence of male power within the reciprocal complaints of 'Sāus Putohu'; and the commercialisation of marriage beneath the vocabulary of auspicious ritual in 'Sagun'. The study uses the thought of Sharan Kumar Limbale, Sharmila Rege, B. R. Ambedkar, and dialogic criticism as comparative instruments, without speculating about the characters' castes or the author's private intentions. Ultimately, Safi's short-short stories turn the easy conversation of the village into an instrument of social criticism. Their artistic strength lies in the collisions of situation and dialogue; their weaknesses, at certain moments, lie in overt instruction, narrative incompletion, and the absence of women's independent voices.

Keywords

Sandeep Kumar Safi; *Baiśākhme Dalānpar*; *vihani kathā*; seed-story; Mithila; Dalit literature; witchcraft accusation; superstition; women's labour; mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relations; dowry; marriage market; dialogue; social satire.

1. Introduction: A Small Form, an Expansive Society

The question of short narratives in Maithili literary history is not merely one of counting words. Which social incidents are considered fit for storytelling, whose

speech becomes the centre of a narrative, and how a writer can awaken a wider experience in the reader's mind with very few words are questions bound up with the identity of the *vihani kathā*. The short-short story section of Sandeep Kumar Safi's *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* attracts attention from this perspective. The third of the book's five creative sections, it occupies an intermediate position between poetry and the short story, a position that permits the possibility of generic experiment beyond the simple narration of events. The original section contains only three stories, but all select moments in village life where ordinary speech becomes evidence of a social order of thought.

'Andh Viśvās' begins with a routine exchange of greetings and news; 'Sāus Putohu' with an instruction to perform housework; and 'Sagun' with a marriage intermediary's advice. None begins with an extraordinary event. Yet as their conversations proceed, the social inequalities, misuse of tradition, and human grievances concealed within ordinary life are increasingly exposed. The writer's central ability is to select small conversations in domestic spaces rather than make grandiose claims about meaning.

The context of Safi's autobiographical section also merits attention. The introductory editorial note establishes his autobiography as an important literary entry of Dalit experience into Maithili. But this does not automatically imply that every story he writes centres on the same caste-related situation. The castes of the characters in all three short-short stories are not directly identified. Their social perspective must therefore be evaluated in light of the author's life situation without inventing caste identities for his characters.

2. The Generic Ground of the Vihani Kathā

The word *vihani* is associated with a seed. A seed contains the possibilities of life in miniature; similarly, the brief scene of a *vihani kathā* is left to grow into a wider narrative world in the reader's imagination. An earlier discussion of literary genres by Gajendra Thakur mentions the designation as an attempt to give Maithili a distinctive term separate from the Hindi *laghukathā*. The presence of separate collections devoted to *vihani kathā* and short stories within Videha's publishing programme clarifies the historical context of this naming. Yet a distinct name does not in itself establish the formal independence of every work: that must be tested in the original text.

A criterion for the *vihani kathā* should be that a restricted scene, meaningful conversation, social implication, and the resonance of an ending work together. If a character's final sentence explains everything, the didactic maxim may take precedence over the seed. If dialogue is present but circumstances do not change within it, the result may remain merely a record of conversation. If conflict is presented without resolution, that incompletion may be either a weakness or a signal of life's actual complexity. A close reading of the three pieces is useful on these terms.

In ‘Andh Viśvās’, an accusation suddenly emerges after an extended exchange of ordinary news; in ‘Sāus Putohu’, the density of the quarrel becomes the entire narrative movement; in ‘Sagun’, a brief sequence of discussion, suggestion, and agreement exposes the dowry system. Here the ‘utterance’ is more decisive than the event. What characters say inadvertently discloses their social positions, expectations, and relations of power.

3. Critical Method and Cautions in Reading

This study keeps four levels in view simultaneously. First are the available scenes and the characters’ direct statements. Second are the domestic, gendered, economic, and communal relationships at work behind those statements. Third are the order of conversation, time, endings, and the narrative purposes of vernacular language. Fourth is a possible dialogue with other Indian Dalit literatures and feminist criticism. This does not mean that external theory may place its own statements in the characters’ mouths. Narrative evidence is admissible only insofar as the text itself sustains it.

Sharan Kumar Limbale examines the relationship between the aesthetic value of Dalit literature and social experience. Sharmila Rege establishes the importance of the intersections of caste, women’s voices, and life narratives. These perspectives enable a more subtle recognition of labour, social reputation, and inequality in Safi’s stories. Some scenes, however, concern gendered oppression; others the economics of marriage; and still others folk belief. To insist that all three are necessarily direct incidents of caste atrocity would violate the claims of the text.

Another aspect of this caution concerns historical precedence. The book’s editorial matter and the Videha list identify Safi’s autobiography as the first Maithili Dalit autobiography. This is an influential editorial position; in the absence of an exhaustive archival survey, it need not be presented as an incontrovertible historical verdict. Claims of being first in literary history and questions of actual literary achievement are two different matters. This review attempts to establish the artistic and social worth of the *vihani kathā* from their own texts.

4. ‘Andh Viśvās’: The Entry of Fear into Everyday Conversation

‘Andh Viśvās’ begins with a respectful meeting between Kākī and a young married woman. The elderly woman complains of bodily pain, the effects of the easterly wind, and the ineffectiveness of medicine; the other woman replies to questions about the family, the children’s examinations, and the summer holidays. The story does not immediately disclose its central dispute. Instead, it establishes the credible sequence of conversation in folk life. Bodily illness, age, domestic obligations, and a family living at a distance become elements of the same world. This elaboration of everyday speech animates the narrative, though

it also places the story at some distance from the incisive brevity expected of a *vihani kathā*.

In the opening exchange, Kākī mentions household goods sent by her son from Delhi—cooling hair oil, soap, and materials for washing clothes. These details are not simply a list of consumer products. They contain migration, the attentiveness of an absent son, and the continuity of domestic labour. Modern objects sent from the city reach the elderly woman's body and household work without ending her pain, social loneliness, or familial contradictions. The storyteller makes no large pronouncement about 'modernity': a life situation emerges from the naming of objects.

Kākī criticises the meals made by her daughter-in-law. At the same time, she expresses pride in plucking *arakanc* from behind the house and preparing her own dish. Through this conversation the older woman asserts her competence in labour, standards of taste, and authority within the family. When superstition enters the story later, the reader understands that the village world of women cannot simply be divided into the two clear categories of ignorant and knowledgeable. Memory, experience, rivalry, affection, and prejudice coexist within it.

5. Two Scenes in 'Andh Viśvās': From Conversation to Accusation

At the end of the first part, an extended series of dots signals a change of scene. Choṭkī then asks Baṛkī Dīdī about another woman in the village: does she wish to learn charms and magic? The tone of the question contains both ridicule and doubt. Choṭkī's next remark introduces occult practitioners, rumours of dispatching a goddess, accusations of 'witchcraft', and frightening assertions about the death of a child. Through this transition, Kākī's world of exchanging family news is suddenly filled with the possibility of social violence. Folk explanations of bodily illness and its causes take the form of communal accusation.

The storyteller never shows the woman accused of being a 'witch' in her own person. The reader hears her defamation only through the speech of others. This absence is significant: the accused person's existence starts to be defined by rumour. She cannot present her own account; even the story's final rebuttal comes from another woman. In this sense, the story certainly criticises 'rumour about women', but it cannot bring the accused woman's own voice into its narrative. That gap remains an important question for future Maithili women's storytelling.

Superstition is not merely a private belief; it becomes an instrument for damaging communal relationships. If someone's illness or death is attributed to a woman's 'occult knowledge', actual medical care, evidence, and the complex causes of grief recede from consideration. Village gossip is not a judicial hearing, yet the language of accusation can operate like a social punishment. Safi's story does not describe an actual occurrence of that punishment, but it clearly shows

the process of accusation. Acknowledging this subtle distinction is essential to the credibility of criticism.

6. Baṛkī Dīdī's Rebuttal: The Voice of Reason and Its Limits

In the final exchange of 'Andh Viśvās', Baṛkī Dīdī checks Choṭkī and explains the social consequences of calling people witches and sorceresses. The final sentence explicitly names superstition. Rather than leaving the reader in doubt, the story thus fixes its ethical position: baseless accusations create conflict in society. This clarity is valuable from the perspective of social awareness, particularly where accusations of witchcraft may imperil women's lives.

At the artistic level, however, a question arises: if a character apparently endorsed by the storyteller supplies a complete didactic maxim at the climactic moment, what space remains for the reader's independent making of meaning? The seed-like form of a *vihani kathā* ordinarily expects meaning to germinate in the reader. Here the character sufficiently explains the meaning herself. This is both the force of the work's purpose and the limitation of its craft. The clarity of social reform may diminish possibilities of narrative ambiguity.

A distinction between 'belief' and 'superstition' is also necessary. The story makes no universal judgement upon religious faith in general: it rejects a specific allegation that someone used magic to cause illness or death. Its humane intent is therefore not to insult a religious community but to avoid assigning blame without evidence. In this narrower, textually grounded sense, the story becomes a notable document of the social reason of its period.

7. 'Sāus Putohu': Command, Resistance, and the Forgotten Account of Labour

'Sāus Putohu' begins with a domestic command: the mother-in-law finds the daughter-in-law asleep in the afternoon and asks her to give water to the buffalo. At first sight this appears an ordinary household difficulty. The daughter-in-law immediately states her case: her hands and feet are exhausted by the day's work; cooking and other responsibilities have weakened her; her head and body ache. Her answer supplies evidence of labour against the accusation of idleness. The character makes her bodily fatigue itself a form of proof.

The mother-in-law then presents an account of her own labour: shaping cow-dung cakes, housework, food and water, and having no time even for worship. Both women say they are exhausted from incessant work. This does not mean their social power is equal, but it does show that most of the responsibility for household production rests upon women's bodies. Cooking, tending livestock, gathering dung, and receiving guests keep the family economy running; yet recognition of this labour becomes a competition over 'who has done more'.

A serious critical question arises here: where are the men of the family? At the start the story gives no account of men's direct labour, domestic cooperation, or

sympathetic presence, although all the tensions around food, animals, and care for older people accumulate between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Thus, while depicting woman's conflict with woman, the story indirectly suggests the problem of the patriarchal division of labour. This is the reader's analytical interpretation; the characters do not themselves formally name this structure.

8. The Exhausted Body and the Language of Respect

The daughter-in-law's expression of a body 'labouring the whole day' is a personal experience of pain. The mother-in-law's reply, 'Do you think I sit idle?', demands recognition of her own work. Both expressions are more immediate than an abstract theory of social class: two generations in the same house labour day and night, but the means of making their work cooperative have failed. Each perceives the other's rest as an injustice. Even the right to leisure within the home becomes implicated in the division of power.

The changing forms of address are significant. Initial familial terms such as 'bride' or 'mother' gradually give way to bitter nicknames, mockery, and abuse. The relationship deteriorates through language. To the mother-in-law, the daughter-in-law's answer challenges discipline; to the daughter-in-law, the older woman's command represents humiliation and labour exploitation. The narrative thus advances less through incidents than through the rising temperature of address.

The story does not make the daughter-in-law entirely innocent or the mother-in-law a one-dimensional villain. The older woman's fatigue is also plausible. Yet her exercise of authority and threat of violence pose a separate ethical question. Recognising both facts makes the characters more credible. The convenient formula that 'both are equally at fault' would erase a moral distinction. A crisis of work can be shared without making a threat of assault legitimate.

9. The Threat of Violence: The Effective Power of an Absent Son

The story's decisive turn occurs when the mother-in-law declares that she intends to have her son beat the daughter-in-law. Although the son never appears onstage, the invocation of his potential violence changes the balance of power in the quarrel. The family's man, though invisible, appears as the imagined bearer of the final right to punish. This reveals the structure of familial authority: patriarchy speaks from within a conflict between two women.

The daughter-in-law's resistance also reaches the vocabulary of bodily violence: she threatens to pull out the older woman's hair. A cycle of retaliation begins. What opened as a simple request to water an animal ends in the language of domestic civil war. This progression is not incoherent noise: it is an artistic condensation of how quickly distrust in household relations can turn into violence.

The daughter-in-law proposes telephoning her younger brother and returning to her parental home. Here the telephone is a social object: a connection to her natal family and the possibility of leaving the household. The narrative does not say that her parental home will offer complete safety; this is only the option declared by the character. The mother-in-law invokes her son, the daughter-in-law her brother. Both summon the power of male kinship to their side. The story thus shows simultaneously the possibility of women's autonomous resistance and the limitations of security dependent upon male relatives.

10. Neighbours and the Hamlet: The Household Does Not Remain Private

The exchanges in 'Sāus Putohu' repeatedly extend to the ears of neighbours. The mother-in-law calls the local community as witness; the daughter-in-law also presents her case before 'Makarā Kākī'. Such forms of address break down the boundary between the inside and outside of the home. Rural public life may become a forum oriented toward justice, but the spread of talk can also increase humiliation. The story supplies no decisive community council, hearing, or resolution; it presents only appeals for witnesses.

At this point a connection with 'Andh Viśvās' becomes clear. There, collective talk takes the form of a witchcraft allegation; here, neighbourhood talk attempts to determine the moral reputations of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. In both, the community's gaze is trained upon women's conduct. A woman's private work, manner of cooking, rest, medical treatment, relations with her natal family, and alleged offences all become objects of social observation. The narrative does not claim that the community is always malevolent; it does reveal the ambivalence of how justice is produced or corrupted within it.

Sharmila Rege's caste-gender criticism offers methodological help here: when reading evidence of women's lives, labour, reputation, and violence cannot be separated as discrete domestic incidents. Yet because Safi has not specified the characters' castes, it would be wrong to treat this story as a direct example of the household customs of any particular caste. To identify a social structure is not to manufacture facts absent from the text.

11. The Unresolved Tension of the Ending

'Sāus Putohu' does not end with reconciliation, apology, separate households, or justice dispensed by the community. Anger remains heated. The daughter-in-law addresses the older woman in bitter language, after which the story ends. The reader must decide why two generations of women have come to regard each other as enemies and what social conditions a solution would require. From the perspective of the *vihani kathā*, this open ending is relatively effective: the narrative shows a problem without supplying a ready-made cure.

The open ending also has limits. The different needs and circumstances of the women, the son's possible intervention, economic dependence, and the interests of children are not developed. This may also be attributable to the brevity of the form. The author constructs a scene through concentrated dialogue, but the story concludes before many layers of social psychology can unfold. It is therefore better understood as an incisive domestic scene than as a compressed family novel.

12. 'Sagun': Auspiciousness and Commerce in the Same Language

The conversation between Ṭhakokākā and Harṣit Bābū in 'Sagun' centres on the marriage of a daughter. At first Ṭhakokākā stresses the necessity of observing tradition and assures him that marriages take place in poor and rich households alike and that the problem will be resolved. The name of Bābā Ugnā provides a religious-cultural ground for reassurance. Harṣit Bābū wishes to arrange the wedding soon because he is in a hurry to travel to Delhi. Here marriage involves not simply sentiment or ritual but practical calculations of travel, opportunity, expenditure, and time.

The title 'Sagun' ordinarily signifies an auspicious beginning. Yet the actual conversation concerns the search for a groom, assurances from an intermediary, an appraisal of family suitability, a proposal to pay cash, and a list of material gifts. The coexistence of good fortune and bargaining gives the title a double meaning. The author does not explicitly state that 'the dowry system is wrong'; what appears as ordinary conversation nevertheless makes a social contradiction visible to the reader.

Safi leaves open the possibility of satire. If the reader sees only the success of a traditional marriage negotiation, the conversation may seem reassuring; if the reader notices the insistence on cash and a vehicle in place of a human relationship between bride and groom, a commercial system is revealed behind the courtesy. The story is socially significant because it sustains this double reading: conduct not called bargaining is presented as ritual.

Folk belief, household voices and the moral economy of marriage

13. Ṭhakokākā: The Language and Authority of the Intermediary

Ṭhakokākā conveys the proposal. He first diminishes anxiety, then praises a candidate whom he has seen, and finally assures Harṣit that the match is 'set'. This sequence demonstrates a subtle social skill: apprehension is removed, an option presented, risk described as small, and an atmosphere established for reaching a quick decision. The intermediary transforms his knowledge of marriage-related social contacts into authority.

According to Ṭhakokākā, the prospective groom is 'preparing for engineering in Bengaluru'. There is an unmistakable difference between preparation and a completed educational qualification. In evaluating a marriage, future possibility operates like present prestige, and the family becomes enthusiastic on that basis. The text gives no warrant for accusing the groom of being a fraudulent unemployed or untrained man: it only describes his preparation. Yet even though his formal qualification remains incomplete, social praise becomes decisive. It is this linguistic construction that the text permits us to criticise.

The prospective groom's parents are no longer present; he has been raised by his maternal uncle and aunt and his grandparents. The information is given briefly, and it cannot sustain elaborate speculation about the groom's character, financial circumstances, or the conduct expected of his guardians. It is part of the narrative's modest social background. By supplying it, Ṭhakokākā also seems to seek credibility as a marriage broker, as though he knows every aspect of the candidate's family history.

14. Harṣit Bābū: Haste, Trust, and Acceptance of Dowry

Harṣit Bābū trusts Ṭhakokākā and urges him to take the proposal forward. At a decisive moment, he agrees to provide cash along with a chain and motorcycle. The list is not a general conversation about wedding expenses, but a readiness to satisfy the groom's family through payments and goods. A social distinction between gifts and dowry may be possible, but language beginning with 'whatever cash they take' and 'whatever they will take' clearly establishes a structure of exchange. The story does not show a demand made directly by the groom; the father offers his agreement unilaterally. That difference is essential to criticism.

The ease of Harṣit Bābū's words, 'We shall give everything', is remarkable. The financial burden may be not only a perceived necessity but also a display of social prestige. Yet the original text does not tell us whether his family is prosperous or will fall into debt. The general assertion about 'poor and rich' families cannot determine its actual economic position. Despite this limitation, the habitual acceptance of dowry transactions is clear.

The story does not announce that the bargain has been completed. 'Go and take the auspicious offering' calls for a subsequent action. The plot stops at the point where financial agreement precedes the marriage, while its other aspects—the daughter's wishes, the groom's consent, a direct meeting between the families, and the actual celebration—remain unknown. This unspoken extension is the seed-potential of the *vihani kathā*.

15. The Absent Daughter: A Woman's Silence in Family Decision-Making

The most striking absence in 'Sagun' is Harṣit Bābū's daughter herself. The person whose marriage is being decided does not speak even once. Neither her education, preferences, disagreement, nor future aspirations are raised in the dialogue. The activity of father and intermediary becomes the real centre of marriage within the courteous social exchange. Her silence must not be treated as evidence of her feelings, but as a limitation of the representation the narrative offers.

This silence differs in its circumstances from that of the woman accused in 'Andh Viśvās', but in both cases others speak about a woman. In 'Sāus Putohu', by contrast, women speak independently, although quarrel, threat, and mutual accusation dominate their utterances. These differences make the three stories an

unusual sequence of women's voices: one woman is defended by someone else, another speaks angrily for herself, and decisions about a third are made solely by men. The comparison provides a useful basis for understanding the stories' internal construction.

It is appropriate here to recall Sharmila Rege's thinking on women's testimonies: the evidence of women's lives is not made complete merely by turning women into subjects; the question of their right to speak must also be raised. Safi's stories do not state that question as explicit theory, but through absence provide the reader with an opportunity to consider it.

16. 'Var Bikāy Laganme' and 'Sagun': Two Voices within a Single Book

The final poem of the poetry section, 'Var Bikāy Laganme', directly satirises the economic rationale of dowry. The pretence of qualifications and the language of the groom's 'rate' attack the distortion of the marriage market. Immediately after it, the short-short story section begins and later, in 'Sagun', depicts a marriage negotiation in which offering cash, a chain, and a motorcycle is utterly unremarkable. Reading these adjacent texts together reveals a critical difference between poem and story: the poem openly attacks the practice, while the story displays its normalisation in language.

It would be easy to reject the difference between these two forms at once as a 'contradiction'. A storyteller sometimes places a social practice in a character's speech without explicit comment; representation is not equivalent to endorsement. Nevertheless, merely presenting a situation and sharpening its inherent contradiction are different artistic achievements. Had the daughter been given the chance to ask a question in 'Sagun', or had a moment of discomfort interrupted the intermediary's assurances, the satirical rhythm might have become clearer. The original story supplies no such additional incident; its critical potential therefore depends on the reader's judgement.

'Sagun' is distinguished precisely by its silent contradiction. The words of auspiciousness recur, while the personalities of bride and groom recede behind the preparations for exchange. A bitter social irony is lodged not in noisy protest but in an orderly, civil conversation. The work allows the reader to understand not only the condemnation of dowry, but also the reasoning that secures its everyday acceptance.

17. 'Māraike Man...', 'Sevā', and 'Sāus Putohu': Contradictions in the View of Women

Safi's poem 'Māraike Man Ta Sāgme Haradī Nai' satirises the multiplicity of women's labour and men's inactivity. A woman manages fodder, childcare, cooking, and household tasks, yet endures violent humiliation. This provides a strong intertextual context for reading the daughter-in-law's exhaustion. But in

'Sevā', the elder's complaints against an educated daughter-in-law's conduct and his expectations of traditional domestic work predominate. Between these poles, 'Sāus Putohu' exposes both women's toil and patriarchal discipline.

The coexistence within one author's work of sympathy for women's suffering and prejudice against the modern daughter-in-law is entirely possible. The moral consciousness of the village itself contains several systems of value. Literary criticism matters because it identifies that coexistence rather than rushing to prove the author wholly committed to women's liberation or wholly conservative. The unequal representation of women's experience reflects tensions of the author's time and linguistic setting, and requires criticism.

The bitter language spoken by the characters in 'Sāus Putohu' is not itself the author's conclusion. Yet the distribution of space and silence among the voices remains a matter of interpretation. The daughter-in-law's account of labour comes relatively early; in the final part the outburst of anger may become the dominant memory of her character. The mother-in-law's account of work is likewise overshadowed by threats of violence. A reader who attends to the entire dialogue may understand both women's circumstances; a conclusion drawn only from the final insult would diminish the narrative.

18. Vernacular Sound and the Social Position of Characters

Dialogue is the principal resource of all three stories. Forms of address such as 'kākī', 'kinyā̐', 'yai', 'Ṭhakokākā', and 'bābū' convey intimacy and distance within relationships. The narrator does not separately provide full social biographies of the characters; their terms of address reveal age, familiarity, authority, and the tone of an occasion. In 'Andh Viśvās', a prolonged exchange of everyday matters creates village social time; in 'Sāus Putohu', bitter statements and responses propel the quarrel; in 'Sagun', reassurances establish an atmosphere conducive to commercial agreement.

It would be erroneous to judge this speech merely as 'impure' or 'unrefined' literary Maithili. The local forms in the characters' mouths are authentic bearers of their experience. Safi makes life present through his own rural register of Mithila; he does not consider it necessary to abandon folk speech in competition with standardised language. But criticism must distinguish natural vernacular diversity from a lack of narrative discipline. Some repetitions in the opening conversation of 'Andh Viśvās' make the scene credible while weakening its tautness.

At the level of implied meaning, speech becomes a source of satire. In 'Sagun', the language of getting a match 'set' treats a human relationship almost as a completed arrangement. In 'Sāus Putohu', 'Do you think I sit idle?' is a way of establishing the legitimacy of one's labour. In 'Andh Viśvās', the word 'witch' places the burden of social blame upon an accused woman. Language here does not merely decorate the character; it performs social action.

19. Dialogism, the Narrator's Absence, and the Ethical Voice

Narratorial explanation is minimal in all three pieces. The characters themselves narrate events in sequence and respond to one another. The narrator's voice recedes into the background. Consequently, the reader experiences the conversations as something heard directly. Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic perspective offers a useful comparison: multiple value-laden voices may collide within one social situation. It would, however, be inappropriate to place Safi's short-short stories on the level of a fully polyphonic novel; they present a limited form of conflicting viewpoints within brief exchanges.

In 'Andh Viśvās', Baṛkī Dīdī's clear, rational statement establishes the story's ethical inclination at the final moment. 'Sāus Putohu' has no single adjudicating moral statement: the explosion of dialogue becomes the conclusion. No voice of objection is present in 'Sagun'; its social incongruity is left to the reader's interpretation. These three types of narrative ending establish differing narrative principles within the same section.

The reader's task shifts accordingly. In the first story, the reader hears a diagnosis; in the second, weighs the claims of a conflict as though judging a case; and in the third, recognises an economic relationship beneath the cover of auspicious language. Rather than a simple developmental line of social consciousness, the sequence can be read as three experiments in generating meaning.

20. Time, Place, and Meaningful Objects

In 'Andh Viśvās', the timing of visits, summer examinations, goods sent from Delhi, and arrangements for cooking locate narrative time within the everyday. Before reaching its central dispute, the story spends time upon ordinary life, then suddenly leaps into the scene of rumour. In 'Sāus Putohu', almost the entire action is compressed into a domestic moment; the weariness of the day enters through speech. In 'Sagun', the future tense before a marriage is decisive: a decision must still be made, an auspicious gift sent, the marriage performed, and the journey to Delhi undertaken. The differing movements of time affect the subjects of all three stories.

Objects acquire changing literary meanings too. In 'Andh Viśvās', oil and soap suggest care for the home and migration elsewhere. In 'Sāus Putohu', the buffalo, water, and dung make visible the material labour of household production. In 'Sagun', a chain and motorcycle become objects of new economic prestige. Village social life is consequently no longer a portrait of static tradition alone: it is a changing world in contact with markets, migration, and consumer goods.

This network of material objects exposes rural modernity without exaggeration. Oil sent from Delhi is part of modern commerce, the telephone a medium of communication, preparation for engineering a symbol of an occupational future, and the motorcycle an attribute of prestige in marriage. Yet adopting

modern objects does not automatically produce equality or reason. Mobile communication coexists with witchcraft allegations, educational ambition with dowry, and the crisis of labour with threats of domestic violence.

21. Evidence, Rumour, and Social Knowledge

The central question in 'Andh Viśvās' is: on what basis do people accept an allegation? Choṭkī's statements are underpinned by the logic of 'everyone says so'. The talk circulates not as direct verification of anyone's experience but as hearsay. Baṛkī Dīdī rejects that logic and explains how it causes conflict in society. Without resort to difficult philosophical terminology, this opposition can be understood as the ethical problem of evidence versus rumour.

In 'Sāus Putohu', both parties offer their work as evidence, but each refuses to recognise the value of the other's labour. In 'Sagun', information supplied by Ṭhakokākā becomes the basis for a marital decision: the question is one of information and trust. The three stories thus present different situations of social knowledge—baseless accusation, mutual distrust, and confidence in an intermediary.

Navya-Nyāya epistemology or social epistemology may supply comparative languages useful for reading these narratives, but Safi's texts do not themselves advance such formal philosophical frameworks. Keeping that distinction clear, it is more useful to ask ordinary questions: why should a heard allegation be deemed true? Who will recognise the labour performed? How will the introduction of a prospective groom be verified? All three questions arise naturally from the narrative situations.

22. The Social Perspective of a Dalit Writer: Beyond Imposed Identity

Safi's autobiographical self-presentation clearly depicts inherited caste-based service labour, financial deprivation, and the difficult struggle for education. Against this literary-biographical background, the social perspective of the short-short stories becomes more meaningful: household work, public slander, and conversation about marriage become legitimate literary subjects. Yet the text cannot prove that the accused woman in 'Andh Viśvās' necessarily belongs to the Dhobi community, or that the family in 'Sagun' is certainly Dalit.

Dalit literary criticism calls not only for attention to a writer's caste but for understanding how writing reveals unequal social relationships. Sharan Kumar Limbale's aesthetic thought centred on social experience is relevant at this level. Safi's three stories do not stage direct acts of caste humiliation; they focus instead upon injustices and conventions within ordinary village life. The author's Dalit experience may enable a standpoint, but it provides no evidence of every character's caste. Such a reading opens literature to a wider criticism of social relations rather than locking it inside a narrow compartment of identity.

These questions can enter historical dialogue with Ambedkar's anti-caste thought: social reputation, human dignity, and the right to equality. The stories, however, contain no direct theoretical report on the caste system. A more appropriate observation is that destroying a woman's reputation through slander, imposing discipline by domestic violence, and maintaining the pressure of monetary exchange within marriage are social tendencies contrary to the principle of equality. On this wider ethical basis, criticism enters into dialogue with theory.

23. Women's Voices, Class, and Intersecting Relations

Criticism of these stories cannot end with sympathy for women as subjects. A woman's class position, age-ranking in the family, the nature of her work, and relations of authority in marriage are intertwined. In 'Sāus Putohu', the crisis of work shared by an older and a newly married woman becomes a generational question; in 'Andh Viśvās', the burden of social slander becomes a question of the communal gaze; in 'Sagun', a daughter's marriage becomes a matter of household finance. Reducing this complexity to a universal formula of 'women's suffering' would erase the particulars of the texts.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectional analysis and Sharmila Rege's studies of Dalit women's life narratives clarify the usefulness of such a method: violence, work, and social identity may operate along multiple axes simultaneously. The concepts nevertheless arise from different historical circumstances, and since the class or caste of the characters in 'Sāus Putohu' remains uncertain, comparison demands restraint in claims of fact.

One distinctive contribution of Safi is that he makes rural women's speech audible. His characters are not merely silent victims: they question, oppose, argue, and articulate their exhaustion. By contrast, the daughter in 'Sagun' is silent, and the accused woman in 'Andh Viśvās' does not herself speak. This three-dimensional situation provides rich material for thinking about the representation of Maithili women. Criticism reads not only the presence of voice but also its absence.

24. Tradition: Preservation, Control, and Commerce

In 'Andh Viśvās', an attempt is made to hold a woman guilty in the name of folk belief; in 'Sāus Putohu', the family custom of obeying elders becomes an instrument of power; and in 'Sagun', the tradition of marriage ritual provides acceptance for transfers of cash and goods. Tradition does not mean the same thing in the three narratives: in one it is belief, in another domestic authority, in the third social prestige. A question nonetheless unites them: should the argument 'It has always been this way' be accepted without examination?

Modernity is not a simple name for liberation in Safi's stories either. A migrant son in Delhi can send modern domestic goods without eliminating village slander; contact by telephone offers the daughter-in-law the possibility of

leaving for her parental home, yet the family's violent speech persists; preparation for engineering signals new educational aspirations, while dowry transactions remain. Rather than a simple opposition between tradition and modernity, one can discern their entangled relationship.

The success of the *vihani kathā* lies in giving this complexity a visible form. The storyteller writes no large treatise on society; he sets ordinary conversations between individuals before us. Where a reader sees only the ease of a traditional custom, a criticism directed at the system becomes possible. This is a particular literary accomplishment of socially engaged writing.

25. The Comparative Structure of the Three Stories

The principal movement of 'Andh Viśvās' is from casual conversation to a final statement of reason. Its structure is 'multiple topics—social accusation—explicit conclusion'. 'Sāus Putohu' develops through 'command—retort—threat—counterthreat', ending not in resolution but in concentrated tension. 'Sagun' follows the pattern 'reassurance—introduction of the candidate—financial agreement—invitation to perform the auspicious rite'. These three structures disclose different formal possibilities within the genre.

The first story is centred on an idea; the second, on voice; the third, on situation. The first emphasises a reformist statement, the second a collision of experience and anger, the third the suggestion inherent in social normalisation. This distinction prevents the critic from measuring every piece by the same criterion. One story tells the reader 'Do not believe this'; another asks 'On whose side is justice?'; the third compels the question 'What is actually taking place within this seemingly auspicious conduct?'

The limits of 'conclusion' differ in all three. A character in 'Andh Viśvās' refutes the accusation, but the fate of the woman accused is not shown. The conclusion of 'Sāus Putohu' does not halt the conflict. 'Sagun' does not proceed to the marriage. From this perspective, the plots end but the social processes remain incomplete. In that incompletion lies the seed-like power of the *vihani kathā*: actual life does not stop at the final line of a story.

26. A Balanced Examination of Artistic Achievement and Limitation

The first achievement is the vitality of conversational speech. Safi's characters do not deliver polished speeches from storybooks; they speak sentences emerging from the circumstances of village households. The second is the density of social meaning within a small form: no great event occurs, but significant tensions concerning the defamation of women, threats of domestic violence, and the acceptance of dowry become apparent. The third is intertextuality: the poetry section's works on women's labour and dowry give new meaning to the short-short stories.

The first limitation lies in the extended opening circumstances and final didactic statement of 'Andh Viśvās'. Despite the credibility of its proverbs and conversation, the story takes time to reach its central conflict. The second concerns the dominance of abuse and threat at the end of the developing dialogue in 'Sāus Putohu': the investigation of several dimensions of the dispute is left to the reader. The third is the underdeveloped irony of 'Sagun': the social question could have been sharper if bride and groom had been given direct voices. These remarks are not intended to rewrite the stories according to present tastes, but to recognise the strengths and limitations of their existing forms.

An explicit moral direction and artistic polysemy are not distributed equally among the pieces. In 'Andh Viśvās' social objection is explicit and the artistic ending relatively closed; in 'Sāus Putohu' the ethical question is uncomfortable and the ending open; in 'Sagun' ethical commentary is silent while suggestion remains possible. It would therefore be inappropriate to award all three the same sort of excellence or weakness. Narrative craft should be evaluated separately from the importance of a subject, though not in opposition to it.

27. Dialogue with Earlier Criticism and Textual Correction

One extensive published critical discussion of Safi's book, in its account of the *vihani kathā*, chiefly mentions 'Andh Viśvās' and 'Sāus Putohu'. The original section, however, also contains 'Sagun'. This is not a trivial error of counting: the omission of the third story changes the section's range of meaning. One then sees the connection between superstition and domestic conflict but loses the third field of economic transactions conducted in the name of marriage. The present review places all three works in the original section at its centre.

Caution is equally necessary in matters of genre. While acknowledging the cultural importance of establishing *vihani kathā* as an independent Maithili designation, the works gathered under it must be examined individually. Likewise, recognising the historical identification of the author's autobiography does not justify assigning caste or class identities to every character in these stories without evidence. These two forms of restraint are minimal conditions for building a literary history grounded in evidence.

The purpose of criticism is not to reject earlier scholarship altogether, but to reread the original works with the help of the contexts it supplies. Presenting all three stories and undertaking a precise examination of social injustice, labour, folk belief, the structure of marriage, and language reveals the book's wider significance. Its editorial importance and the literary value of its works are separate questions, but both can be brought into dialogue.

28. Conclusion: An Unfinished Society within the Seed

The short-short story section of Sandeep Kumar Safi's *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* is small in scale but extensive in social significance. 'Andh Viśvās' resists the habit of finding women guilty through hearsay. 'Sāus Putohu' depicts women's

domestic labour, generational authority, the indirect threat of male power, and the restricted option of returning to the natal home. 'Sagun' exposes the easy acceptance of financial bargaining beneath the auspicious name of marriage. Together the three stories pose a question about Mithila's social life: whose voices determine the value of human reputation, bodily labour, and family decisions?

The notable strength of these stories is the vernacular. In the characters' conversations the reader hears disputes over religious belief, the devaluation of work, and the economics of dowry. Authorial conclusions are not equally developed throughout, and this unevenness belongs to the work's truthful criticism. The explicit ethical statement of 'Andh Viśvās' raises awareness but diminishes subtlety. The unresolved ending of 'Sāus Putohu' keeps social complexity open. The polite exchange in 'Sagun' produces critical discomfort, while women's silence remains a limitation.

Safi's literary contribution cannot be reduced to a single historical epithet of 'first'. His brief stories make the ordinary life of Mithila's villages into material worthy of thought and literature. A conversation about illness, a tired daughter-in-law's reply, an intermediary's reassurance in a marriage negotiation—these ordinary scenes demand a reconsideration of a social order in which rumour becomes evidence, labour lacks rights, and auspicious ritual becomes filled with financial exchange. Here lies the real significance of these works.

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PART 4 / SHORT STORIES

Food, Labour, and Unequal Rights within the Home

An Extended Literary-Critical Study of the Short-Story Section of Sandeep Kumar Safi's Baiśākhme Dalānpar

Ogarbāh and Pasīkhānā: Close Reading, Social Political Economy, and Narrative Craft

Abstract

The short-story section of Sandeep Kumar Safi's *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* contains two stories, *Ogarbāh* and *Pasīkhānā*. In the first, an elderly watchman's longing for rice, his diet of finger-millet flatbread, remuneration for guarding crops, traditional agricultural implements, and the changing village economy generate an extended discourse on agriculture and society. In the second, the drinking of a man called Bhukhnā, his tendency to evade work, his sale of the family's foodgrain, violence against his wife, and his children's experience of deprivation expose a crisis of domestic life. Both works are centrally concerned with the relation between hunger and labour. In the first, a labourer who protects the grain growing in the fields is nonetheless deprived of adequate food; in the second, a woman works while the man claims authority over the consumption and sale of the household's grain. This article closely reads narrative position, openings, repetition, dialogue, collective memory, the disposition of objects, women's speech, class relations, the limits of caste representation, and environmental suggestion. In comparative dialogue with Sharan Kumar Limbale's aesthetics of Dalit literature, Sharmila Rege's perspective on caste and gender, and the criticism available in *Videha*, it argues that both stories bring socially disregarded labour into the centre of literature. Nevertheless, the movement of *Ogarbāh* from description toward a didactic essay and the frequently one-sided presentation of female experience in *Pasīkhānā* invite artistic scrutiny. Conjectures concerning the characters' caste or intentions left unstated by the author are not accorded the status of evidence.

Keywords

Sandeep Kumar Safi; *Baiśākhme Dalānpar*; short story; *Ogarbāh*; *Pasīkhānā*; Dalit aesthetics; agricultural labour; hunger; crop watching; women's labour; alcohol consumption; domestic violence; social realism; vernacular language; environmental memory.

1. Introduction: Short Stories, Two Different Social Worlds

In Maithili prose, experiences arising from village labour have often furnished the material of folk description; how the perspective of the person who performs that labour becomes the semantic centre of a story, however, is a different question. The short-story section of Sandeep Kumar Safi's *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* raises it in two directions. *Ogarbāh* begins with an elderly crop watcher's hunger and reaches the changing configuration of an agricultural civilisation. *Pasīkhānā* presents the suffering within a labouring family through the distinct voices of a child, a husband, and a wife. The two pieces are neither of equal length nor organised by the same kind of plot development. Literary assessment should begin with precisely this difference.

In this five-part collection, the short stories follow the autobiography, poetry, and *vihani kathā* (very short narratives). In the autobiography the author recounts experiences of his Dhobi community, poverty, education, and migration. In the short stories he moves away from the immediacy of the autobiographical 'I' to construct social characters whose speech, hunger, insecurity, and domestic conflicts engage with his lived world. The historical Dalit identification of the autobiography is important, but it cannot provide a shortcut for establishing the ascribed caste identity of the fictional characters.

The present research-based criticism treats neither work merely as an inventory of rural problems or as a decoratively idealised tale. It examines how the manner of telling, the story's withholding of information, narratorial intervention, objects of consumption, the temporality of work, and the right to speak together transform social reality into literary experience.

2. Position in Literary History and Priorities of Reading

The first edition of *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* was published by Shruti Prakashan in 2014. *Videha*'s publication catalogue identifies the book as including the first Dalit autobiography in Maithili. The significance of that designation lies in a historical claim concerning the autobiographical section. To dissolve the other sections into the same single epithet would be an injustice to their literary character. Fiction has its own generic logic, which requires an independent examination of character, action, time, narration, and closure.

Gajendra Thakur's extensive English criticism published in *Videha* mentions the agricultural ecology and domestic economy of Safi's two short stories. It provides an important antecedent for critical dialogue, particularly concerning the hunger of the crop watcher and women's unacknowledged labour. Yet for certain interpretative propositions the original story alone is decisive. Alongside assimilating earlier criticism, re-examining its textual claims is indispensable to serious literary inquiry.

Accordingly, this study enters into the structure of exactly two works from the short-story section. The expansive essayistic character of *Ogarbāh* and the scene-

driven theatricality of *Pasīkhānā* are not measured by an identical standard of brevity. Differences of form can indeed become artistic weaknesses, but their meaning changes in relation to narratorial purpose and the proportions of the social subject.

3. Critical Method: Explicit Statement and Interpretative Inference

A narrator's statement, a character's utterance, a circumstance represented within a story, and a critic's conclusion are not the same thing. This distinction is essential in *Ogarbāh*, where there are numerous general observations about soil fertility, fertilisers, tractors, domestic appliances, and rising prices. That these ideas occur in a literary text is beyond dispute; their scientific validity, however, cannot be demonstrated by the story alone. Similarly, *Pasīkhānā* represents a household crisis in association with alcohol consumption, but the critic cannot supply a medical diagnosis or a complete background that the story does not provide.

The critical orientation of Dalit aesthetics prompts this study to ask whose lives count as experiences worthy of literature, how the language of labour and humiliation changes, and how an ordinary person's utterance becomes a declaration of literary entitlement. Sharan Kumar Limbale's book is an important theoretical reference for these questions. Since the characters' caste names remain unspecified, however, the framework is properly employed as an instrument for understanding the social distribution of labour, not as a means of assigning caste identities to them.

Sharmila Rege's thinking offers a second line of inquiry into women's labour, voice, and the power relations of narration. Although both stories are organised around male figures, the women's food, exhaustion, management of resources, and opposition can be discerned. Yet the women in these texts are not the authors of their own life narratives: their voices are composed by a male storyteller. An assessment of female experience is more critically responsible when it acknowledges this mediation.

4. The Opening of *Ogarbāh*: Longing for Rice and the Ageing Body

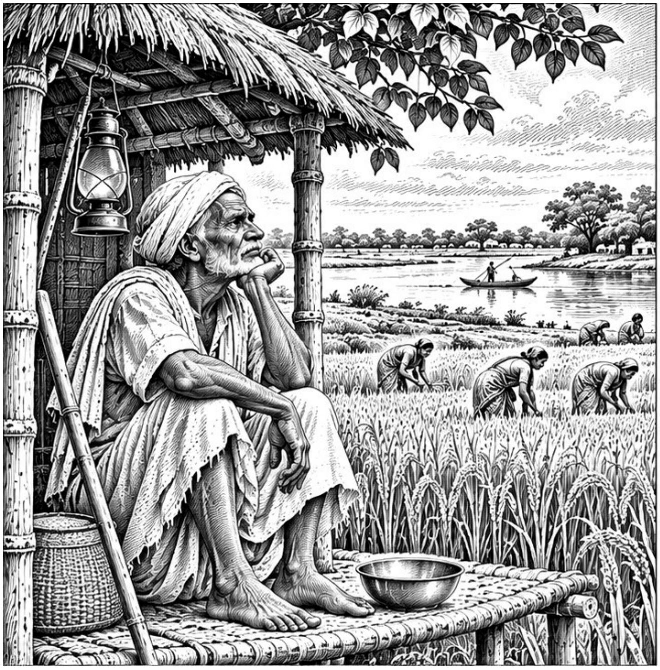
Ogarbāh begins not with a proposition about agricultural science but with the memory of food: "It has been a very long time since I ate rice" ("बड़ दिन भऽ गेल भात खेला"). In that brief sentence, the story gives hunger a historical and affective duration: obtaining grain is no longer an ordinary daily event but something to be awaited. The difficulty of chewing finger-millet flatbread, the taste of pulses and chillies, abdominal pain, and the daughter-in-law's irritation converge upon a single body. The elderly narrator's limitations of teeth, taste, and digestion convert his social poverty into palpable bodily experience.

It would be wrong to leave finger-millet flatbread here as nothing more than 'the food of the poor'. The difficulty in the story is not its supposed caste symbolism but the elderly man's altered physical capacity and the intensity of his appetite. The imagined meal of khesari greens, rice, and mashed potato does not transform eating into a feast; it marks the rarity of ordinary food. Through 'rice', the story creates a suffering in which grain available for consumption and the food desired by the mind have become separate things.

The daughter-in-law's irritation also raises questions. The story conveys her response from the old man's perspective; her own exhaustion, access to resources, and possible helplessness are not directly available. Sympathy for his distress therefore remains necessary, but to declare her insensitive would exceed the evidence of the text. The literary force of this opening inheres in that incomplete relationship.

5. The Name of Labour: *Ogarbāh* as a Social Designation

The title *Ogarbāh* names an occupation rather than a particular individual. Watching fields, cutting or draining irrigation embankments, protecting crops from animals and birds, and attending to the fields day and night together constitute a recognised role in village life. The story mentions a watchman named Nathunī Maraṛ. He chooses elevated ground, builds a temporary shelter there, and observes the cultivated land from it. The landowner's name is secondary; the work of the person who guards the crop becomes the centre of the narrative.



The labourer guarding grain: hunger and the limits of ownership

The relationship between cultivator and *ogarbāh* is not represented as a modern contract paying a fixed monthly wage. Several householders ask him to watch their fields, promising grain after the harvest or a return from the edge of a plot. In this exchange, the worker has no assured income: the existence of a harvest and the conduct of the landowner become crucial. When the labour of someone who keeps watch throughout the year will become remuneration depends partly on an arrangement he does not own or control.

The word *ogarbāh* contains the invisibility of labour. Histories of farming readily discuss the farmer, the plough, seed, and yield; the people who endure the nights, sunlight, water, birds, crop pests, and sleeplessness of crop protection are often excluded. Safi makes this kind of work the very name of a literary story—an achievement of literary significance.

6. He Must Guard the Field, but Cannot Fully Enjoy Its Produce

The person who safeguards the field cannot himself eat sufficient rice: this is the sharpest ideological contradiction in *Ogarbāh*. His entitlement to the use of the grain he protects for others is limited. The story does not formulate the contradiction in theoretical language; by connecting the opening desire for rice with the intervening description of work, it allows readers to arrive at the significance themselves.

Crop protection is not an effortless action of nature. Its duration is bound to the entire agricultural cycle: observation after transplanting, attention to embankments, draining water, preventing the entry of animals, and remaining vigilant until harvest. To the owner, this is security; to the labourer, it is one source of livelihood. Once this double meaning is recognised, the story ceases to be a merely picturesque account of an agrarian community and becomes an authorial interrogation of labour and property.

The story does not, however, provide a precise wage schedule or comparable figures. To infer that every *ogarbāh* is exploited by an identical rule would therefore exceed its evidentiary scope. It offers an experiential portrait of one local labour arrangement that can generate questions for wider research, not final statistical evidence for the agricultural economy as a whole.

7. The Watch Hut, the Kamalā, and the Meaning of Rural Landscape

Nathunī Maraṛ's watch hut, built on raised ground, is a minor detail containing an entire geography of labour. Height is necessary for surveying the fields; a place to remain through day and night is necessary for guarding the crop. The hut is not the household's permanent home but a temporary station of work. It also marks the distance between labourer and field: the watcher is close to the soil but apart from the centre of ownership.

The fertile soil along the Kamalā River, sugarcane cultivation, varieties of paddy, and a road leaving the village locate the story within Mithilā's geography. Soil has not only natural properties; the pressures of development and the consequences of human decisions are impressed upon it. A road may provide social convenience, but the narrator feels the loss of farmland. Here the story opens the possibility of challenging a unilinear understanding of 'development'.

The agricultural vocabulary—*air* (field embankment), transplanting, crop watching, watch hut, crop pests, and names of particular rice varieties—preserves the vernacular's situated knowledge. These terms should not be treated as direct equivalents of standardised scientific classifications; in literary terms, however, they constitute a verbal map of lives lived in the fields.

8. Agricultural Modernity: Distinguishing Critique from Generalisation

Ogarbāh discusses transformations from ox-drawn plough to tractor, from dung and ash to chemical fertiliser, and from the traditional grain pounder to an electrically powered mill. The narrator sees in these changes an abandonment of labour, weakened soil, and a loss of household and village collectivity. The catalogue of implements matters, but so does the narrator's feeling toward them: affection for a passing order and suspicion of the emerging one.

Such feeling should not be construed as literal scientific inference. The broad claims that all chemical fertilisers destroy soil fertility in the same way, that tractors in themselves reduce crop yield, or that using a gas stove proves the moral degeneration of village life belong to the language of fictional experience, not to comparative scientific research. The storyteller makes a character's viewpoint credible; readers should also remain alert to its limits.

One especially significant contradiction concerns women's domestic labour. Gas stoves, mixers, hand pumps, and other conveniences can reduce labour; the narrator tends instead to see them as evidence of collective tradition's collapse. A communal regime of work that a male narrator remembers nostalgically may also have imposed heavy daily labour upon women—a question the story does not clearly address. At this point its village memory becomes one-sided.

9. Education and Agriculture: Not Opposition, but Interdependence

The story does not simply repudiate the younger generation's schooling. A character acknowledges that education is necessary, but then asks how money and education can sustain life if food is not produced. The question of money's conversion into the means of nourishment, arising from village experience, is serious. It challenges the tendency to regard agricultural work as inferior while considering office employment alone respectable.

The story gives the example of a young man unwilling to take up a hoe in the field. There is irony in this generational distance, but the children of farmers cannot be blamed for aspiring to education. A conflict between education and agriculture arises most acutely where agricultural labour lacks dignity, security, and adequate remuneration. This alternative political-economic explanation is not fully developed in the story.

The narrator also entertains the possibility that an agricultural engineer might advise farmers. Thus to read the work under the simple rubric 'education against farming' would be one-sided: it contains a desire for cooperation between educated knowledge and popular experience. The artistic force of this idea could, however, have become more concentrated had the story linked its argument more closely to dramatic incidents.

10. Consumers and Producers: Political Economy in a Single Sentence

In the middle of *Ogarbāh*, anxiety is expressed that the number of those who 'eat' (*khenihār*) is increasing while that of those who 'produce' (*upajenihār*) diminishes. This is a vernacular judgment on the village economy. It gives the story internal tension concerning rights to agricultural resources, willingness to work, and the value of grain in the marketplace. Yet the word 'consumers' also risks calling into question the entitlement to food of everyone it includes. Children, older people, people with disabilities, and workers outside agriculture also have a right to nourishment.

The literary importance of this argument lies in the fact that the narrator does not leave hunger as merely a private desire: he begins to consider the distribution of food across society. But to compress the separate consequences of wages, landholding, climatic disaster, and markets into the single term 'idleness' limits his thinking. In several passages the condemnation of new ways of life obscures the complexity of social structures.

The story thus invites criticism. Its intellectual disquiet is an authentic literary experience, but not every conclusion drawn from it is equally tenable. Critical respect does not entail endorsing every pronouncement of an author; it means studying seriously the questions active within a work.

11. Creatures Driven from One Field to Another: The Paradox of Interdependent Poverty

Near the story's close comes an image: the watchman of one field drives creatures into another field, and its watchman drives them back again. In very few words this scene produces several meanings. One guardian's success becomes another's difficulty. A boundary between fields is not a moral boundary for animals, but it is indispensable to the arrangements of human livelihood.

The scene can be read as a subtle metaphor of mutual competition. The labourers are not enemies, but their responsibilities are defined in such a way that one man's solution intensifies another's problem. A shared social difficulty—protecting crops—is fragmented into the temporary defence of individual plots. A collective solution is absent; the paradox of 'saving one's own while feeding the other's' intimates that absence.

The suggestion arising from this scene is more durable than the author's explicitly instructive paragraphs, because the scene speaks for itself. Here the intrinsic artistic possibility of *Ogarbāh* reaches its height: less explanation of meaning and more symbolism embodied in experience.

12. Circular Closure: The Opening Question Remains

The ending of *Ogarbāh* returns to the scarcity of rice with which it began. Having travelled through extensive discussions of agricultural policy, social change, technology, education, and inflation, the reader returns to the elderly body whose desire for food has not been fulfilled. This circular structure gives the narrative a significant meaning: there has been much debate, but hunger remains where it was.

The ending, however, does more than repeat one opening sentence: the initial description of food also recurs. Through this return, the composition resembles a cycle of memory. If the aim had been to translate the narrator's thoughts into narrative action, recurrence could have intensified the oppressive conditions; as it stands, the length of the discursive passages sometimes causes the elderly protagonist of the opening to be forgotten for a long interval.

Literary evaluation must therefore hold two outcomes together. On the one hand, the cycle of deprivation reveals the cruel persistence of life's conditions; on the other, the paucity of developing action gives the story an essayistic form. Safi's endeavour matters because he raises questions of agrarian political economy in the language of fiction; his principal artistic difficulty is that thought frequently overpowers scene.

13. The Opening of *Pasīkhānā*: The Call to Work and the Unresponsive Household

Pasīkhānā opens in the immediate tension of dialogue. A tractor operator calls Bhukhnā to paid earth-cutting work, but he remains asleep at eight in the morning. His small son comes out, holding a tin bowl containing leftover rice and radish greens. The child explains that after an argument with his mother the night before, his father has not risen. Three mutually contradictory temporalities coexist here: the appointed morning of work, the child's need for food, and the suspended day of the adult man in the household.

The power of the opening scene comes from its minimal narratorial explanation. The tractor operator brings an opportunity for employment; the child discloses the crisis at home without literary sermonising; the mother is in the field, cutting paddy. The man has the social claim to be household head, but the scene conveys his unproductive presence.

The story's first meaning takes shape through the child's eyes. He does not offer a medical analysis of intoxication; he reports what he has seen. His meal of leftover rice and greens is a concrete manifestation of the family's resources. Realist fiction often reveals an extraordinary crisis through just such ordinary objects.

14. Bhukhnā's Hunger: A Personal Name and a Moral Contradiction

The protagonist's name is Bhukhnā. It need not be treated as evidence of one certain etymological lineage, but the sound of *bhūkh*, 'hunger', readily resonates for a reader. Immediately upon waking, he demands the previous night's fish and rice, whereas the child says that the household cooked greens and rice and that the father himself quarrelled with the mother over money to buy oil. The difference between father and child in their recollections of a single meal exposes the man's ethical position.

Here hunger has two forms. One is a legitimate bodily need; the other is a social claim to control what food should be prepared. Bhukhnā's hunger is real, but the story tests his character by asking who must bear its cost. His wife labours in the field, his child eats what remains, and the husband demands a variety of food to whose procurement he makes no contribution.

Merely dismissing Bhukhnā as a comically lazy man would diminish the story's complexity. The narrative intimates relations among disordered livelihood,

drinking companionship, and poverty, but does not provide a definitive psychological account of causation. The critic's responsibility is to scrutinise his behaviour without imposing a diagnostic label unsupported by the text.

15. The Sack of Paddy: Control of Resources in a Household of Scarcity

When Bhukhnā finds nothing to eat, he takes half a sack of the household's paddy to the market and sells it. This is the story's decisive turn. Paddy is not merely grain within the home: it is the family's future sustenance and also an embodiment of the wife's savings and labour. To convert it into immediate personal expenditure reveals an unequal distribution of authority over resources.

The list of purchases—biscuits, matches, *bīṛī* cigarettes, and betel nut—is short but densely significant. The collective use of household grain is diminished as the consumption associated with individual habits increases. The objects' names, their small prices, and the sequence of purchase anchor the story in a particular marketplace and moment. This list is not merely a moral sermon against a 'bad man'; it is an operational account of domestic political economy.

The reader is led to ask who among the household members approves or refuses the sale of its grain. The wife is absent, working in the fields, and a unilateral decision becomes possible in the moment of that absence. The distance between control over resources and contribution through labour is among the story's most serious political meanings.

16. The Sociality of Drinking: Personal Disposition and Collective Practice

Returning from the market, Bhukhnā encounters four companions who plan to go somewhere to drink. Friendship appears here not as a community of song, conversation, cooperation, or shared labour, but as an invitation to consume alcohol. Bhukhnā has already been awaiting such an opportunity. The story makes drinking not merely an isolated individual trait but an event in the communal organisation of time.

Unlike an extended novel, however, the narrative does not explore the companions' separate backgrounds. Who they are, what work they do, and why they drink remain unspecified. That absence calls for caution in social diagnosis. The story gives clear evidence of a habit's destructive effects upon one family, but does not license defining an entire community or class by the same fault.

The title *Pasīkhānā* centres a social place, although the action actually unfolds through the house, veranda, marketplace, and neighbourhood conversation. The drinking place itself never becomes an elaborated scene; it is evoked as the man's intended destination and named in the woman's complaint. Making an absent location operate as a present social force is a meaningful narrative device.

17. The Interior Exposed Beyond the Home: A Woman's Opportunity to Speak

The opening of *Pasīkhānā* revolves around the husband and child, but the story's fuller social reach begins when the wife speaks. Discovering the paddy missing, she asks neighbours about it; ordinary questioning slowly becomes an extended account of her life. She recounts how her husband goes out to drink palm liquor, refuses to stop despite warnings about illness, withholds money for the household, beats her, and leaves the family dependent on her work.

The significance of this act of speaking is that violence within the private household becomes a matter for public neighbourhood discussion. The woman presents her account to a neighbour, who becomes an alternative listener, although the story does not establish her ability to provide a remedy. Tears, anger, contempt, and apprehension about the future mingle in the wife's account. This is not simply lament: it is also a demand that labour be recognised and respected.

Yet there are limits to this freedom to speak. The wife's life is narrated within the husband's shadow; her independent ambitions, organisations of work, and avenues of social support lie outside the story. The storyteller allows her voice to be heard, but confines its world to a complaint directed against the husband. Both achievement and limitation must be read together.

18. A Woman's Earnings: Paddy Harvesting, Livestock, and Household Survival

The story states plainly that Bhukhnā's wife harvests paddy in other people's fields. She must care for the children, procure food, rear goats, worry about school expenses, and endure the behaviour of an ill or drunken husband. These numerous tasks are compressed into the space of an ordinary day. From the perspective of household political economy, she is not merely a 'housewife' but the foundational support of the family's survival.

The prospect of selling a goat to obtain money, or the loss of jewellery previously put aside, exposes the double terrain of a woman's saving and insecurity. Resources fail to remain secure despite labour; the family's earnings may be dissipated through an individual's drinking. The economic violence represented here is not limited to physical assault but includes unaccountable authority over jointly sustained household property.

In studying Dalit women's lives, Sharmila Rege makes the interwoven issues of caste, food, labour, and violence central. Inspired by this theoretical perspective, one can see the wife in *Pasīkhānā* not simply as a woman who opposes an alcoholic husband but as the person who bears both productive and reproductive labour. Yet the narrative does not specify her caste identity; accordingly, the conceptual framework must remain within the limits of available textual evidence.

19. The Story of Violence: Not an Immediate Event but Remembered Injury

The wife's and child's accounts refer to a beating the previous night. The wife says that when she asked for money to buy oil, her husband responded violently. Narrating rather than directly staging the incident does not diminish its importance; on the contrary, it reveals how persistently the memory of injury within the home survives in a woman's and a child's voices. Narratologically, however, this is a remembered event, not an action unfolding in the immediate scene.

The breadth of the woman's complaint connects violence to the lack of food, clothing, medicines, and education. To read it merely as a marital quarrel would render invisible the structural problem of access to resources. Bhukhnā's conduct is a private habit, but its consequences extend across several lives. The child's educational opportunities, the wife's health, and the family standing of the elderly parents are all within its reach.

Toward the end the woman says she wants to go to her natal home, yet circumstances repeatedly change, the day advances, and the proposed departure is deferred. This can be read not as a dramatic vow but as the condition of constraint. An alternative can be named, yet the social and economic capacity to act upon it remains uncertain. The story grasps a serious reality of domestic violence in this inability.

20. The Small Child's Voice: An Ethical Witness to Family Life

The opening words are an adult man's summons, but the child tells the visitor what is actually happening. He says his father is asleep, recounts the quarrel, and contradicts the father's imagined meal of fish and rice. The child lends narratorial credibility to the household's internal circumstances. His account remains simple: he does not establish the father's guilt through psychological terminology.

The child's food and the fact that his mother is in the fields prevent the story from lapsing into abstract condemnation. Education, nourishment, and safety are three separate rights of the child; the husband's conduct puts all three in jeopardy. The wife speaks of the difficulty of finding the money for the schoolmaster's fee, linking the danger to the child's future with his present hunger.

The narrator does not subsequently give the child an extended role; the work ends after the wife's monologue. If the child's opening question had returned as an echo in the conclusion, the force of intergenerational suffering might have become even sharper. Yet the opening is already so incisive that readers cannot forget the child's bowl of leftover rice until the story ends.

21. Narrative Craft: From Scene to Extended Monologue

Pasīkhānā develops through three movements: first, the call to work and a brief dialogue with the child; second, Bhukhnā's movement between home, market, and companions; third, the wife's extended accounting of the household before a neighbouring woman. The sequence is virtually arranged as three dramatic scenes. The first establishes circumstances; the second discloses wrongdoing in action; the third makes audible its psychological and economic consequences.

The final monologue gives the woman the longest speech in the work. At this level the story moves from dialogue-driven narration toward something resembling extended oral testimony. Repetition, the recurrence of complaint, sudden movement between incidents, and direct address to a neighbour are living features of the village's oral culture. To dismiss this rhythm as merely 'uncontrolled' would be inappropriate: the memory of suffering may issue not in a neatly disciplined literary sequence but in a surge of speech.

There nevertheless remains the critical question whether internal scenes, brief pauses, or counter-voices might have made this long monologue more concentrated. The author's social position is clear. Art sometimes renders a personality multidimensional, and sometimes turns a character into little more than evidence for a predetermined verdict. *Pasīkhānā* stands between these possibilities.

22. The Absent Centre of *Pasīkhānā* and the Irony of Place

The title names a place where alcohol is consumed, but readers spend most of their time with the household veranda, labour absent in the fields, purchases from a shopkeeper, and neighbourhood discussion. Not witnessing the interior of the drinking place does not diminish its social power: it remains an attractive destination whose shadow reaches the home. Drinking becomes not simply the act of consuming alcohol but an organisation of time, companionship, expenditure, and escape from responsibility.

The difference from *Ogarbāh* is evident. The first title names a labouring role; the second, a social site of consumption. The former makes social thought emerge from the physical circumstances of fields; the latter shows the consequences of an unseen drinking establishment inside the household. Both titles give literary identity to work or places at the margins rather than to society's recognised centre.

'Where are you?' is therefore more than a geographical question in these stories. The agricultural worker guards a field without owning its grain; the man of the household remains physically at home while absent from the work that sustains it. Such reversed meanings of the titles distinguish Safi's selection of short-story subjects.

23. Language, Forms of Address, and Social Distance

Village speech is not ornament in either story. Forms of address such as 'रौ', 'यै', 'हौ', 'बौआ' and 'दोस' establish different degrees of intimacy, age, relationship, and authority. The elderly speaker of *Ogarbāh* uses a vocabulary saturated with the memory of agricultural labour, while the child's brief answers, Bhukhnā's commands, and the wife's extended resistance in *Pasīkhānā* are divergent voices within a single linguistic world.

In *Ogarbāh* the flow of speech often becomes monologic: the speaker continues explaining changes in the world to a reader or imagined listener. The opening dialogue of *Pasīkhānā*, by contrast, immediately sets a scene in motion; when the wife speaks, conversation expands into monologue. This development differentiates the works' creative dispositions. The vitality of the vernacular lies not merely in colourful words but in their social function.

In quoting the established text, it would be critically improper to standardise dialectal forms such as 'नै', 'अछि' and 'छै' into supposedly uniform 'correct' versions; the characters' voices inhabit those differences. Analytical prose may maintain its own standard form while respecting the uneven rhythms of the literary work itself.

24. Two Forms of Hunger: Scarcity and the Struggle over Consumption

Hunger is the internal thread connecting the two stories. In *Ogarbāh* an elderly labourer protects grain yet cannot obtain the rice he desires. In *Pasīkhānā* a father demands the food he prefers while a child eats leftovers and a woman works in the fields to secure grain. In the first, hunger is bound to property and remuneration; in the second, to distribution of the household's material resources and responsibility for their provision.

The hunger in the first story recurs: its initiating question remains unresolved at the end. In the second, selling the paddy provides an immediate answer to appetite, but undermines the family's food security. This does not mean that both hungers occupy the same ethical position. It is necessary to distinguish the labourer's deprivation from one person's unilateral consumption of collective household resources.

Neither story makes rice an extraordinary emblem: it remains the ordinary food of family life. Precisely for that reason, its absence or disproportionate demand assumes a hard significance. Around the bowl of rice, the value of work, the insecurity of generations, and the power relations of the home become visible.

25. The Social Dignity of Labour: The Crop Watchman and the Earning Wife

The elderly man of *Ogarbāh* protects fields throughout the year, yet is not ordinarily counted in discussions of food security. Bhukhnā's wife in *Pasīkhānā* harvests paddy, tends animals, and performs domestic work, but the man refuses to relinquish his authority despite his failure to work. One story questions remuneration for labour; the other, its gendered division and inequalities of entitlement.

Read together, the two stories enlarge the definition of labour. Ploughing a field or earning cash is an insufficient measure. Watching crops, tending livestock, caring for children, storing grain, and preparing meals all reproduce social life. The invisibility of such work becomes an issue of literary ethics.

A later time-use survey conducted by the Government of India reveals the widespread national presence of unpaid domestic labour performed by women. This finding is not direct evidence about the particular village at the time Safi's story was published; it nevertheless reminds critics that the historical significance of domestic labour cannot be confined to the realm of feeling. The woman's experience in the story retains its own literary specificity.

26. Caste, Class, and Caution in Applying Dalit Aesthetics

In his autobiography Safi expressly identifies his relationship to the Dhobi community. That experience sensitises readers to hereditary caste-based labour and the obstacles to education. But the stories do not establish the precise caste of Nathunī Maraṛ in *Ogarbāh*, or Bhukhnā, his wife, and child in *Pasīkhānā*. To infer their caste and present their experiences as documented incidents of one particular Dalit community would be to overstep the authority of the text.

The stories are worth reading through Dalit aesthetics because they centre experiences of labour, inequalities of hunger, the uneven respect accorded to dialects, and domestic structures of power. Here a Dalit perspective is valuable as a question about social subordination, not as a means of fastening a caste label upon every person. Ambedkar's critique of caste supplies the intellectual background for the wider structural problem, but every specific claim about caste hierarchy in the fiction must still be supported by the original text.

The collection of Dalit writing edited by Arjun Dangle reminds us that the literature of resistance is not a single, linear genre: it may appear as fiction, poetry, recollection, and criticism. Safi too adopts several forms in the same volume. This range signifies not merely abundance of material but multiple literary claims upon the territory of his experience.

27. Representing Women: Testing Speech and Silence Alike

The daughter-in-law in *Ogarbāh* becomes irritated by the elderly man's food habits, but her thinking is not developed at length. In *Pasīkhānā* the wife

delivers the longest speech in the entire narrative. This comparison is significant: in one work the woman is a reacting presence within a man's memory; in the other she becomes a public speaker who recounts the economic consequences of a man's conduct.

The wife in *Pasīkhānā* chooses the very vocabulary of domestic oppression: paddy, goat, oil, clothing, jewellery, children's schooling, sickness, and the expense of drinking. Her grievance contains an inventory of real household life. What her separate plan for the future might look like, however, remains open, almost like a question in poetry. Her proposed return to her natal home is beset by constraints. Readers perceive that the right to speak does not automatically confer secure independence.

Rege's thinking on the narration of women's lives is useful here, but it would be equally misleading to treat the wife as a published autobiographer in her own right. She is a fictional character whose voice is made possible by the craft of a male author. To examine this duality is not to depreciate the author's endeavour; it is to understand it more clearly.

28. Intergeneric Relations: Poetry, Autobiography, and Short Story

Safi's poem 'Rauḍī Bha Gel' ('Drought Has Come') portrays parched fields and a crisis of food; 'Gāmak Inār' ('The Village Well') considers the changing social meaning of a shared water source; 'Māraike Man Ta Sāgme Hardī Nai' links domestic violence to women's work; and 'Maraitakhīn Rasgullā Khāeb' evokes the vulnerability of an ageing body. Placing *Ogarbāh* and *Pasīkhānā* beside these works reveals several internal echoes across the volume.

These echoes do not mean that every piece is a chapter in a single preplanned plot. Each poem carries an independent meaning through its rhythm and imagery. But when the reader encounters labour, hunger, water, and domestic power together, a continuity within the author's concerns becomes apparent. The agricultural temporality of *Ogarbāh* and the domestic day of *Pasīkhānā* enrich the collection's broader seasonal and social sensibility.

The autobiography's treatment of migration and the struggle for education is relevant here, but must be used carefully. Autobiography makes a claim to truthful self-narration; a short story constructs a fictional world of characters. It is appropriate to trace the literary relation between recurrent social questions, not to force every fictional incident into the author's biography.

29. A Textual Review of Earlier Criticism

Gajendra Thakur's extensive criticism published in *Videha* recognises the importance of the want of rice in *Ogarbāh*, changes in agriculture, and the suggestion produced by creatures being driven from one field to another. One may concur with the critical proposition that the relation between a labourer's hunger and the agrarian economy is the story's chief affective centre.

Nevertheless, wherever essayistic generalisations expand within the narrative craft, criticism must also recognise an artistic imbalance.

In that earlier discussion, an account of *Pasīkhānā* also refers to police corruption. The original story clearly presents the tractor operator, the child, Bhukhnā, his companions, his wife, and the neighbour, but narrates no separate incident of police corruption. That specific conclusion therefore cannot be accepted as evidence drawn from this story. Grounding critical judgment in the primary text is one possible correction of such a discrepancy.

This correction does not seek to disparage the wider literary-historical contribution of earlier criticism in *Videha*. The reliability of evaluation increases when a published commentary and the original story are read against one another. Both respect and scepticism deserve an equal place when scrutinising the artistry and ideological structure of a historically important work.

30. Between Story and Essay: The Generic Question of *Ogarbāh*

A large portion of *Ogarbāh* consists of direct narrative commentary on changes in agrarian life. Its elderly protagonist supplies the opening thread of fiction, but the speaker then reflects continuously on technology, farming, education, inflation, and domestic equipment. The weight of social essay grows in comparison with the development of incidents. Is it therefore appropriate in literary terms to call the work a short story? The published section itself classifies it as such; accepting that generic designation need not prevent discussion of its internal unevenness.

A story is not merely a momentary surprise; an extensive social argument can also enter narrative matter. Yet a story's significance should arise from scenes, characters' choices, and transformations through time. *Ogarbāh* has richly suggestive scenes—the old man's food, his watch hut, and birds in the fields—but long stretches of intellectual exposition separate them. These distances repeatedly interrupt the reader's affective involvement.

Even so, the final recurrence prevents the work from becoming a pure essay. After an extended debate about the social history of grain, the narrative returns to an ageing body's longing for rice. This meeting of story and essay is the work's experimental quality. Its artistic achievement is incomplete, yet the questions it poses grow more important.

31. The Ethics of *Pasīkhānā*: Beyond Apportioning Blame

On the surface, *Pasīkhānā* seems to be a social story against alcohol consumption. Yet within it, household grain, a worker's unemployment, women's paid and unpaid labour, children's education, domestic violence, and the company of peers converge. To close these questions with the declaration 'alcohol is bad' would obscure the serious social foundations of the struggle to survive.

Bhukhnā's conduct must be criticised because he spends the family's resources on his own wishes and subjects his wife to violence. Yet making one person the final object of blame leaves unresolved the larger issues of insecure income within agrarian society and the distribution of authority in families. The story does not adequately explain those problems, but its scenes offer a basis for raising them.

The most credible literary feature is that the consequences of one person's decisions are visible in the lives of a young child and a working wife. The work thereby moves beyond moral exemplum toward a realistic record of social outcomes. Its restricted world of characters provokes questions about the larger society, which it remains for readers and social criticism to explore more fully.

32. The Temporalities of Two Stories: The Seasonal Cycle and the Shock of a Day

The time of *Ogarbāh* is the cycle of agricultural seasons: transplantation, crop watching, paddy harvesting, wheat and other crops, periodic drought, changing tools, and the ageing body. Memories of society across several years are contained within a single short story. By contrast, the external action of *Pasīkhānā* takes place over approximately one day, though the wife's account gathers together misfortunes extending over a much longer period. In the first, history surrounds the present; in the second, a shock in the present exposes numerous old wounds.

This is another point of connection. The worker of *Ogarbāh* labours across time without escaping deprivation of food; the man of *Pasīkhānā* forfeits one day's opportunity for work, deepening an old domestic crisis. The former concerns the inadequate reward for labour; the latter, unequal responsibility for performing it. These arrangements of narrative time give rise to different ethical questions about labour's value.

The distribution of time indicates the writer's control over narrative terrain. *Ogarbāh* is more diffuse and recollective; *Pasīkhānā* more visual and responsive. Such difference under one generic label broadens the possibilities of Maithili fiction, even if their formal balance is unequal.

33. Achievements with Limitations: An Overall Judgment

The chief achievement of *Ogarbāh* is to connect the life of a person guarding crops with wider questions of political economy and ecology. The longing for rice, the watch hut, the guarding of fields, and the scene of driving animals between two plots remain memorable. Its limitation lies in didactic extension, generalised distrust of technology, and idealisation of traditional women's labour. Affection for village life is a necessary virtue, but without criticism of its distribution of work, that affection may become one-sided.

The principal achievement of *Pasīkhānā* is to disclose numerous social and economic connections through brief scenes. A child eating leftover rice, the call to employment, the sale of grain, drinking companions, and the woman's long

testimony make it moving and memorable. Its limitations include a somewhat one-dimensional presentation of Bhukhnā, the neighbourhood dialogue's expansion into an overlong monologue, and the insufficient development of the woman's horizon of possible solutions.

The social importance of both subjects is beyond dispute, but artistic superiority is not automatically demonstrated by the seriousness of a subject. Scene construction, integration of material, multiplicity of voices, and resonance of closure are separate criteria. Measured against these, *Pasīkhānā* is a comparatively concentrated dramatic prose narrative, while *Ogarbāh* is distinctive as a hybrid of idea-driven rural social essay and fiction. The judgment is not a single numerical ranking but an attempt to discern their different modes of creation.

34. Conclusion: Food for the Labourer, Voice for the Labouring Woman

In Sandeep Kumar Safi's short-story section, two different situations combine in a shared question: how are the rights to food, dignity, and decision-making determined for those whose labour makes village livelihoods possible? The elderly man in *Ogarbāh* guards grain in the fields, yet longs for the rice he prefers. The wife in *Pasīkhānā* harvests paddy, yet does not have ultimate control over the household's use of its grain. In these two reversals lies the most intimate thread of the book's social meaning.

In both stories, vernacular language accords literary dignity to words from Mithilā's world of labour. The field embankment, watch hut, finger-millet bread, khesari greens, tin bowl, goat, veranda, cooking hearth, and sack of paddy are not ornamental images resembling poetic decoration: they become palpable evidence of the struggle of living. The storyteller perceives the social inequalities of his time. In some places his analysis is incisive; elsewhere it becomes memory-bound, moralising, and reductive.

Within contemporary debate on Maithili Dalit literature, the importance of these stories enters into dialogue with the author's autobiographical presence, without conjecture about the fictional characters' caste. Safi's principal contribution is to turn the ordinary labour of obtaining food, a domestic worker's accounting of expenses, and everyday village cruelty into literary material. The social range of Maithili literature is thereby enlarged. This achievement deserves respect, but formal imbalance and ideological prejudice also require criticism; only then does a serious reading become complete.

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PART 5 / REFLECTIONS

Compassionate Kingship and the Question of Rights

An Extended Literary-Critical Study of the Reflections Section of Sandeep Kumar Safi's Baiśākhme Dalānpar

Rājā Aor Parajā: Contradictions of Village Power, Labour, Memory, Migration, and Social Justice

Abstract

The fifth section of Sandeep Kumar Safi's *Baiśākhme Dalānpar*, titled 'Reflections' (*Vichār-Bindu*), contains a long reflective composition, *Rājā Aor Parajā* ('King and Subjects'). Its central concerns are an older ideal of village leadership, wages paid in grain, the breakdown of relations between patrons and dependants, the search for work in cities, and the benevolent duty of kingship associated with Janaka in popular memory. The intervening question is whether a just basis of social relationships should rest upon an individual's compassion and prestige or upon the labourer's rights and dignity. On one hand, the work sees protection of subjects in the old order; on the other, it also registers low wages, unequal property, and dependence in that very order. This contradiction is treated as the work's principal literary significance. The criticism examines the difference between popular memory and history, the symbolic employment of religious ideals, the repetitions of oral prose, class relations and the silence concerning caste, agrarian political economy, migration, unequal access to food, and the narrator's moral accusations. It enters into dialogue with relevant thinking by B. R. Ambedkar, Sharan Kumar Limbale, Sharmila Rege, Gail Omvedt, and James C. Scott, without substituting outside theory for the original composition. The study concludes that *Rājā Aor Parajā* expresses heartfelt concern for social justice, yet its tendency to replace the subjects' rights with the generosity of an exemplary ruler constitutes an ideological limitation. Its literary importance also arises from that unresolved question.

Keywords

Sandeep Kumar Safi; *Baiśākhme Dalānpar*; *Rājā Aor Parajā*; *Vichār-Bindu*; Maithili Dalit autobiography; village authority; labour; subjects; folk memory; migration; food justice; duty of kingship; Janaka; Dalit aesthetics; social criticism.

1. Introduction: An Extensive Question in a Short Section

The title 'Reflections' in the fifth section of *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* may lead readers to expect a brief series of aphorisms. The work itself is different. *Rājā Aor*

Parajā is continuous, changing its examples and comparing past with present in an extended discursive prose. Its title seems to signal a tale about two persons, but the composition is actually concerned with the social order, mutual trust, the value of labour, and the changing basis of local domination. Calling it simply a moral tale, essay, or memoir would therefore fail to capture its full form. Here vernacular memories, traditional vocabulary, and the structure of moral narration converge within a reflective discourse.

In the autobiographical section, the writer recounts his birth, Dhobi-Dalit identity, family labour in washing clothes, interrupted schooling, and migration in search of employment. It would be inappropriate to divorce the reflective voice of the fifth section entirely from those experiences, but equally wrong to treat every general statement as a directly documented event from the autobiography. *Rājā Aor Parajā* is not an administrative register of one particular village; it is the literary meditation of an authorial speaker upon social relationships. Its credibility, achievement, and limitations must be found in its own linguistic formation and organisation of argument.

Videha's editorial declaration and publication note furnish a background to the importance of this book in the history of Maithili Dalit autobiography. This background makes the reflective work a serious subject of literary history. Yet the editorial designation 'first' is itself a historically situated archival claim; it should not be reiterated as a universal and exceptionless conclusion without a renewed survey of the wider literary record. The purpose of criticism is to examine the work's capacities in its actual language, subjects, and craft.

2. Determining the Genre: Reflective Points or Social Essay?

The term *Vichār-Bindu* suggests aphoristic points, brief meditations, or discrete fragments of thought. Yet the prose remains linked from beginning to end to one overarching subject: the reciprocal responsibilities of rulers and the governed in society. First comes popular trust, then the marriage of a poor man's daughter, payment of agricultural workers in grain, greedy landlords, migration to cities, Janaka's famine story, and finally the distribution of food. This sequence displays the characteristics of a developing debate, not the autonomy of isolated aphorisms. The piece certainly digresses, but each turn circles around its central question.

It may be useful to call it a vernacular social essay, because it advances a case for justice in the idiom of popular remembrance and conversation rather than learned definition. The recurring contrast between 'formerly' and 'now' establishes a comparative structure. Having claimed that the past afforded protection, the narrator recalls its economic practices in the next paragraph. Rather than dialogue between characters, we hear the speaker's own judgments through this succession of reflections. Readers are invited to interrogate their grounds, not simply to accept the author's conclusions.

This generic mixture is not necessarily a literary weakness. The utterances of socially dispossessed labouring communities often move between life narrative, social commentary, and ethical saying. Strict categorisation of written prose can diminish such linguistic mobility. Nevertheless, alongside a generous understanding of form, one must still ask how rigorously the work organises concentrated argument, evidence, and counterargument.

3. What Does 'King' Mean: Office, Individual, or Local Power?

The 'king' at the opening is an influential village man to whom people take their disputes and from whom they expect assistance. Here the word cannot be read as the technical title of a constitutional monarch or elected representative of the modern nation-state. Its social meaning is constructed from local dominance, wealth, prestige, and the concentration of personal judgment. This shift in perspective is important: the community appears as a body of people seeking justice from a 'king', but the capacity to grant justice is vested in a person rather than an institution.

Toward the end, the same word extends to King Janaka. Janaka is a cultural emblem of exemplary royal duty in Mithilā. The writer draws no explicit dividing line between the two senses. The prosperous village patriarch of the opening gradually becomes comparable to the moral image of a mythic benevolent ruler. At this junction both the strength of vernacular imagination and its ideological hazard are present. Recalling an exemplary figure can intensify popular expectations of responsibility, but real historical inequalities may vanish in the shadow of a radiant ideal.

Nor is *parajā* ('subjects') synonymous with citizens endowed with modern rights. The word carries at once shades of shelter, obedience, dignity, fear, service, and cooperation. The core question is more than a change of designation: how far has the social journey from subjecthood to citizenship advanced within the literary imagination?

4. Justice, Trust, and Public Disputes

The first scene shows villagers approaching the king to settle social conflicts. This brief episode evokes the memory of an informal village system of justice. Courts, written law, representation, and formal appeals do not appear in this account. Authority is presumed to rest upon trust and personal standing. In the narrator's view, the first sign of moral decline is that such trust no longer survives.

Trust, however, is not synonymous with justice. An individual's influence and people's willingness to bow before him do not establish that his decisions were equal for all parties. To which social group did the arbiter belong? Could the weaker party speak freely? What weight was given to women's testimony? What choices had a labourer who refused the judgment? The text leaves these questions

open. This silence should be treated not as a retrospective historical accusation against the author, but as a limitation of narratorial perspective.

Here Dalit criticism introduces an indispensable test: how should justice be assessed? If a social arrangement rests on the goodwill of a powerful person, who protects the dispossessed when that goodwill weakens? The opening inadvertently opens the door to this profound question, yet looks for its resolution in remembered conduct, not in the analysis of institutional rights.

5. The Marriage of a Daughter and the Political Economy of Protection

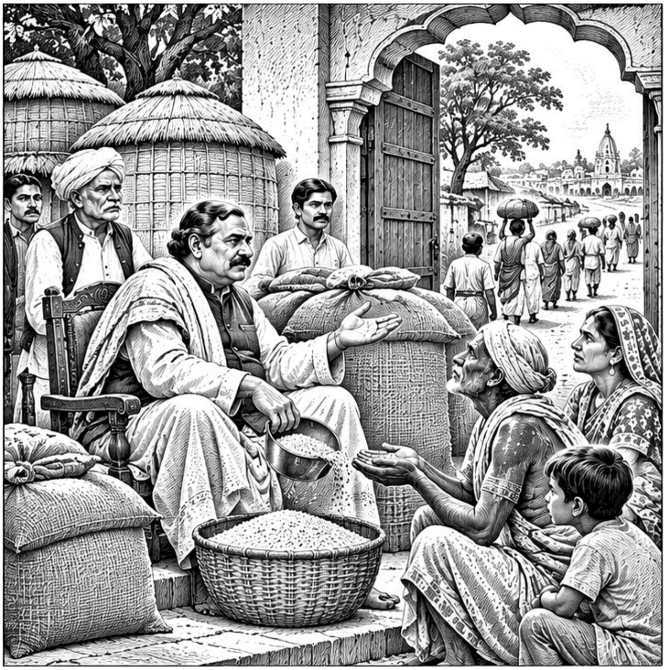
The work describes a father approaching the king for help with the expense of his daughter's marriage. The king promises financial assistance, and the subjects become grateful to their protector. Familial crisis, public standing, and personal largesse converge. When marriage expenses exceed an individual household's means, the village's centre of wealth claims to provide the solution.

This is an intimate and compassionate picture, but attention must also be paid to the fact that assistance depends on one influential person's favour rather than an entitlement. Social generosity may relieve immediate suffering; it is certainly a desirable human quality. If, however, the burden of a poor daughter's wedding arises from social inequality, does charity remove that inequality or merely postpone the crisis? The work does not clearly distinguish the two.

Elsewhere in the volume, critiques of dowry and the marriage market are evident. The paradox of financial exchange in 'Var Bikāy Laganme' and the negotiations in 'Sagun' open a necessary debate with the image of kingly assistance in this reflection. Should the remedy for intolerable marriage expenses be a charitable king or an organised and just society? The question asks for an answer from within the five-part book itself.

6. Displaying Wealth and Claiming Moral Legitimacy

In *Rājā Aor Parajā*, the large drum, grain storehouses, elephants, and great gateway appear as signs of prestige. The speaker says that villagers felt safe and content under such dominant men. Displayed property becomes evidence of social trust. The composition gives a visual form to the psychology of dependence upon protectors.



Compassionate patronage, unequal grain, and the journey toward the city

Yet the fuller the granary, the more urgent the questions: who grew that grain, who profits from storage, and who determines its distribution in times of need? From the standpoint of social rights, a king's prosperity and his subjects' well-being are not synonyms. The narrator assumes a connection between these social facts; criticism asks for its evidence. His ethical ideal is a generous rich man, not a social institution distributing property justly.

This difference does not invalidate the poetic picture. Elephants, horses, and grain vividly suggest how power is constituted in popular consciousness. Village memory produces not only images of want but aspirations to honour and protection. As literature the scene works effectively; ideologically it cannot remain exempt from questioning.

7. The Price of Labour: Finger Millet, Barley, and the Landowner

The essay's most concrete historical experience appears in its discussion of giving finger millet or barley to agricultural labourers for ploughing the fields. The narrative moves here from the abstract 'good king' to the material ground of work, food, and payment. Ploughing is physical labour; grain received for a day's exertion is the basis of a worker's subsistence. The word 'master' makes the inequality of authority unmistakable.

In his autobiography, Sandeep Safi remembers his parents washing clothes in return for wheat flour, paddy, or other grains. In the reflections, similarly,

agricultural workers receive payment in grain. The forms of labour differ, but the informality of remuneration and social dependence give rise to common questions. The book gains intertextual depth: several forms of social labour become windows onto one economic world.

B. R. Ambedkar's reflections on the graded division of labouring communities offer a useful comparative standard here. Caste is not simply a technical division of work; it also shapes the social rank of those who do it. Yet this essay does not identify the caste of every labourer. Certain correspondences among caste-linked experiences can therefore be recognised, but it would be improper to fabricate caste identities for unnamed characters.

8. The Fundamental Ideological Gap between Compassion and Rights

One central paradox of the piece is that owners formerly paid agricultural workers very little grain—and yet that era is remembered as a moral ideal. Later, owners seek greater profit and are condemned. Human values are certainly at issue in the change, but the earlier relation of servitude or inadequate wages receives little attention. The measure of justice appears to become the degree of generous behaviour rather than a worker's rights.

Compassion is a praiseworthy disposition in an individual. But if it is made the permanent foundation of a labourer's life, unequal relations of power remain unaltered. The subject's existence continues to depend upon how good the king happens to be. In this sense, a tension emerges between a traditional paternalist outlook and modern questions of justice. Rather than dismissing it as a simple contradiction in the author, a more productive reading sees it as a sign of social consciousness in transition.

The work's strength lies in compelling readers to ask what remains in the structure of society when assistance ceases. Its limitation lies in an underlying hope that restoring assistance will itself resolve the problem. Criticism need not impose an artificial historical certainty in place of that answer; its task is to reveal the absent question of rights.

9. Inflation, the Desire for Profit, and the Narrative of Moral Decline

The narrator attributes social change in part to rising prices and the landowner's desire to acquire more fields. Grain formerly given to labourers becomes a commodity for sale and the accumulation of property. Greed is operative: the greater the wealth, the greater the wish for more. The owner looks to his expanding household, while the needs of his dependants recede.

This explanation of socioeconomic transformation, however, is principally centred on a moral alteration in individual character. Questions concerning market prices, production costs, landownership, relations of production, and

institutional wage structures largely remain unexamined. That is not necessarily a defect in the writer: a vernacular essay expresses the changes it perceives in the available language of ethics. A critic assessing its economic claims, however, cannot accept private greed as a complete explanation of history.

Rājā Aor Parajā is in a particular sense a vernacular articulation of moral economy: society expects its wealthy members to contribute to the survival of the vulnerable. James C. Scott's study of the 'moral economy' of peasant communities supplies a comparative language for that expectation. Its geographical setting differs, so its conclusions cannot be treated as direct evidence for Mithilā's local history.

10. Workers Leaving the Village: The Unspoken Logic of Migration

In the work, the subjects begin leaving their villages to earn in the city. This is the clearest social sign of the rupture of older village relationships. When owners fail to discharge their responsibilities, workers feel compelled to seek other opportunities. The traditional village arrangement of protection is no longer a reliable means of subsistence. The city is not represented as an ideal place of liberation, but becomes a geography of alternatives.

Safi's autobiography gives this reasoning a lived dimension: travel during childhood to Nepal, later journeys for employment toward Punjab and Chandigarh, then Bengaluru, alongside difficult efforts to continue studying. These experiences clarify the social atmosphere of the general propositions in *Rājā Aor Parajā*. Yet the autobiography's specific journeys cannot be made the history of every migrant labourer in the reflective essay. It is appropriate instead to read the interconnected themes of hunger, work, opportunity, and displacement across the two texts.

Migration is depicted on the one hand as a source of communal disintegration and on the other as a means of escaping a landowner's arbitrary conduct. This ambivalence matters. A worker's departure diminishes village community life, but if remaining in the village required submission to unequal labour relations, the pain of change and the possibility of independence coexist within the same event.

11. From Village Subject to Urban Worker: A Change of Identity

Migration puts the identity of the 'subject' in crisis. When a labourer tied to a village landowner's fields moves toward the city, his relationships are no longer determined solely by the protection of one individual. He must find a place amid wages, new social networks, unfamiliar employers, and changing occupations. In this sense, the story implicit in the essay also suggests a possible passage from subordination to partial independence, even as its explicit voice mourns the disappearance of older trust.

It must be acknowledged that leaving the village does not automatically constitute progress. The insecure work, deception, illness, loneliness, and distance from family associated with the city appear in several forms in Safi's autobiography. Even so, the worker's capacity for choice does not disappear entirely from the account of migration in *Rājā Aor Parajā*. He pauses to consider whether seeking employment elsewhere may be more practical than working for years in return for inadequate compensation.

This contradiction should not be turned into a simple progressive narrative of social history. One arrangement breaks down, but the new order does not guarantee security. Literature's task is to see human choice amid this insecurity. Safi does not formulate a structural theory of that choice, but makes its ethical cost acutely felt.

12. Five Kilograms of Paddy and a One-Rupee Matchbox: The Meaning of Objects

One particularly effective passage compares the quantity of paddy received for a day's labour with the small market price of matches. The juxtaposition conveys an imbalance in the system of value and the worker's humiliation through concrete objects. On one side stands a day of bodily exertion; on the other, the cash exchange value of a trifling item. The object is not an entry in an economic statistical table but a visible medium of the narrator's ethical argument.

The evidence furnished by the composition cannot support a calculation of historical price trends. There is no detailed account of year, region, wage rates, grain quality, or price indices. It would therefore be improper to claim that real wages rose or fell in a specified year on this basis. Readers can, however, understand what the narrator feels through the comparison: the food received for severe labour is not worth the respect that the work deserves.

In Safi's poetry and fiction, small objects such as flatbread, rice, paddy, finger millet, matches, salt and greens, and the cooking hearth repeatedly acquire social meaning. The language of objects similarly keeps the themes of the reflections grounded. The literary suggestion becomes more forceful through that concreteness.

13. Reference to Land Registration: The Claim of Change and the Limits of Evidence

The speaker recounts an instance in which people who worked in an owner's fields in earlier times managed to have some land registered in their own names. The claim points to the depth of change: a labourer seeks to connect work with landownership or a documented right. It unsettles the dependent meaning contained in the word 'subject'.

Care is required here. The work does not say whether the transfer was associated with a particular law, land donation, sharecropping provision, or government

campaign. The narrator is not writing administrative history. No named land record, year, or region-specific rule is supplied. It would therefore go beyond the source to identify the incident as direct proof of some particular Bihar land-reform event.

Its literary indication is nevertheless important. Landownership can change the foundations of rural power. When a labourer seeks livelihood through earnings, migration, or land rather than depending on an owner's benevolence, the voice of popular aspiration changes. A short statement discloses the historical instability of village social relations.

14. The Accusation of 'Idleness': Contradictions in the Narrator's Outlook

The work says that, after older labour relations collapsed, people grew idle and ceased to care about others. Yet it also shows labourers trying to reach urban employment. The two assertions are ideologically at odds. Leaving arduous village work that yields inadequate remuneration cannot in itself establish idleness; it may also be a search for dignity, better wages, or alternative opportunities.

For many generations within agrarian society, the habit of working has been a social value. From this standpoint, the choices of younger people may appear idle. Safi's speaker incorporates this memory-inflected moral judgment into his analysis of society. Criticism can understand the feeling while also examining the independent meaning of the worker's choice.

The 'people' are not uniform here. A landowner's expectation of work, an elder's discipline remembered from the past, and a young worker's desire for employment may be different things. The text offers no extensive reply from young people, so the accusation of idleness remains limited to one narratorial voice.

15. King Janaka: Ethical Memory, Not Historical Proof

King Janaka of Mithilā enters the composition as a symbol of exemplary rule. The narrator portrays him as one who cares for everything from fields and threshing floors to the lives of his subjects. The story of his prayers and ritual sacrifice in drought offers a supreme example of social protection. In this passage, Mithilā's cultural memory joins individual village experience to construct a larger ideal.

The Janaka story symbolically articulates a ruler's moral responsibilities toward human fate. It should not be cited as evidence of a historically documented famine, a record of agricultural rainfall, or a scientific claim about ritual causation. Criticism attends to the forms and purposes through which folk belief finds a voice in the work. Here Janaka is not a verifiable contemporary administrator but a standard within the social imagination.

An ideal example is powerful because the present can be measured against it. But when the ideal is used to assume that all rulers of the past were 'good', the history of social inequalities may be concealed. The work is not free from this danger. To read Janaka as a comparative symbol does justice to the literature; to regard him as a factual account of Mithilā's entire past does not.

16. Famine, Rain, and the Language of Royal Duty

The subject of drought initially connects to the king's assistance in times of distress, and is reformulated toward the end through Janaka's prayer. Drought thus becomes more than an accident of seasonal cycles: it is a test of obligations between power and people. If grain fails to grow in the fields, subjects suffer hunger, and prosperous rule is judged by how it responds.

In the poem 'Rauḍī Bha Gel', drought is presented through cracked fields, dried ponds, the songs of Jaṭā-Jaṭin, animals and birds, and helpless agrarian life. The reflective essay seeks a political-religious answer to the same crisis. Poetry builds an affective reality, while the essay poses the question of ideal kingship. Together they extend the relation between nature and social duty.

The limitation also deserves attention. Prayer for rain may carry poetic and cultural significance, but the text does not develop the questions of food distribution, water resources, collective preparedness, or worker protection as practical responses to drought. Folk belief awakens social compassion; the design of a just structure remains open.

17. God and Devotee: A Metaphor for Human Relations

After its treatment of Janaka, the composition moves toward an analogy with the relation of God and devotee. The narrator experiences an absence of mutual loyalty and compassion in human dealings. Religious imagination accordingly becomes the language of ethical criticism of society. This is not merely a statement of belief, but a human metaphor for responsibility.

The analogy attracts attention: if God hears the distressed devotee's call, why should a wealthy man or ruler not hear the suffering of his subjects? In this rhetorical arrangement, religious memory communicates compassion, support, and sensitivity. Social criticism acquires an edge from the spiritual image.

Yet when the devotee's surrender and the subject's social position are placed in the same ethical relation, dependence may come to appear natural. The modern question of rights re-emerges. Justice is not only favour bestowed from above, but recognition of every member of society as an equal. The text moves between these two meanings: faith contains sympathy, but its analogy does not make an egalitarian political structure explicit.

18. BPL and APL: Administrative Language Enters Literature

Near the conclusion, modern administrative categories such as BPL ('Below Poverty Line') and APL ('Above Poverty Line') enter the writing. Old diets of barley and millet are compared with contemporary meals of rice, lentils, and vegetables. Vernacular prose suddenly adopts the economic nomenclature of the state. The mixture is a distinctive linguistic sign of social transition: experience is told in popular words, while poverty acquires a new name through administrative abbreviations.

The narrator wishes to comment upon changed food habits and perceptions of poverty. But to say that 'there was no BPL earlier' does not imply that poverty did not exist then; the administrative classification entered common use later. The text does not completely clarify this distinction in its sense of inequality. The kind of food eaten or the appearance of a meal cannot establish socioeconomic equality.

At this point the work moves from experiential observation toward exaggerated generalisation. The criticism does not devalue its compassion; rather, it calls for precision in evidence about hunger and prosperity. A family that eats rice is not necessarily food-secure, free from debt, or protected against caste violence.

19. Equality of Food and Inequality of Labour

The ending presents an optimistic image of something resembling equality in what poor and wealthy people eat and drink. Yet the earlier part of the composition has itself represented unequal relations between owners and workers in distributing grain. This is a serious contradiction: the same kinds of food may be present on the plate, while labour required to obtain it, exposure to risk, rights, and stability differ.

The autobiography recounts washing clothes for subsistence, keeping goats, being forced to interrupt education, and experiencing irregular employment. Against this background, the limitation of identifying social standing merely from the names of food items is clearer still. *Rājā Aor Parajā* expresses a desire to see equality at the level of food, but does not fully develop a discussion of equality in economic security and dignity.

The literary meaning here is unstable. On one hand the writer dreams of the disappearance of hunger; on the other, experience testifies that deprivation is not easily overcome. Rather than regarding this double voice merely as weakness, it is also possible to see the coexistence of social hope and insecurity already endured.

20. Idealising Earlier Times: The Selectivity of Memory

'Formerly' and 'now' are the temporal markers of the composition's poetic imagination. 'Formerly' summons memories of trust, shared food, duty, and human ties; 'now' fashions scenes of inflation, greed, non-cooperation, and

uncertainty. The opposition makes the prose straightforward and accessible to a village audience. Yet the social diversity of the past cannot be contained within this division.

Popular memory can retain the affective truth of experience even when its chronology differs from social history. What Safi's speaker seeks in the past is collective protection and human closeness. Criticism does not reject that longing, but asks what claims were available to the landless, what caste restrictions prevailed, what authority women had over economic decisions, and whether workers could bargain collectively. The composition does not say.

Selectivity is an inherent possibility of memory as literature. If readers understand that the work is society's ethical self-reflection, it acquires value. If its scenes are accepted unchanged as facts about a universally just history, the complexity of the work is destroyed.

21. The Caste Question: Explicit in Life Narrative, Relatively Silent in the Essay

In the autobiography the author clearly identifies his Dhobi community and Dalit affiliation. In *Rājā Aor Parajā*, however, society is principally described through the roles of owner, king, subject, and labourer. Specific caste identifications of the people described, concrete incidents of discrimination, and elaborations of caste-controlled labour divisions are absent. This silence is itself a critical fact; it does not render the author's experience irrelevant.

Dalit literary aesthetics does not impose merely the formal condition that caste names be mentioned. Questions concerning disregarded labour, human dignity, social subordination, and the right to expression may also lie at its centre. Sharan Kumar Limbale's criticism is useful in this connection. Nevertheless, it would be inappropriate to call the essay a revolutionary manifesto. It is a more complex social document: a sensibility emerging from a Dalit writer's lived experience coexists with an older paternalistic ideal.

Read together, these elements raise a question: is human kindness sufficient to escape caste-based dependency, or is a rights-based transformation necessary? The work itself does not offer an adequate answer. Criticism marks the importance of that missing response.

22. The Context of Dalit Autobiography: Acquiring a Public Voice

Videha's contemporary publication account emphasises the place of Safi's autobiography in Maithili literary history. *Baiśākhme Dalānpar* brings together autobiography, poetry, *vihani kathā*, short stories, and reflections. This multigeneric design means the author is not merely a teller of his own suffering: he also claims the literary right to think about society's moral principles, agriculture, education, women's conditions, folk festivals, and communal behaviour.

Gail Omvedt's history of Dalit movements and Ambedkar's reflections on caste make it possible to situate this entry into public discourse within a wider Indian context. The available evidence does not, however, establish these theories as the direct sources of Safi's reflections. They instead open different questions for criticism: who grants justice to labourers, how is social esteem constructed, and whom does collective memory place at its centre?

Listening respectfully to the reflections does not require accepting every opinion they contain. Safi acquires a public space in which to write. The true respect owed to that achievement is to assess his work by concrete argument and by the same critical criteria applied to everyone else.

23. The Absence of Women and the Counter-Voices within the Book

Rājā Aor Parajā discusses the expense of a daughter's marriage, but the daughter's desires, her choice in marriage, the pressure of dowry, and an extended account of women's labour are absent. The collective voice of the subjects is largely male-centred. This is evidence from the immediate text, not a final verdict on the author's representation of women across all his writings.

Elsewhere in the book, poems address violence against women and their burden of work; the *vihani kathā* explore tensions between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law; and the short story *Pasīkhānā* shows a wife sustaining the household by harvesting paddy. These intertexts expose the narrow social representation within the reflections' picture of king and subjects. A language of collective justice that cannot accommodate women's independent voices may remain incomplete in its claim to public welfare.

Sharmila Rege's work on Dalit women's lives establishes the importance of reading labour, violence, caste, and female voice together. Inspired by that perspective, one may pose critical questions to this section, but one must not imaginatively assert that it contains testimony from women where none exists. Respect for a concept is connected to acknowledging the silences of the text.

24. Collective Village Life Compared with 'Pañcanāmā'

Rājā Aor Parajā remembers an exemplary individual arbiter. The poem 'Pañcanāmā', by contrast, presents panch witnesses, surveyors, documents, and measurements as procedures for averting disputes over the division of property and family quarrels. Reading the two together discloses a conceptual distance between an individual ruler's judgment and a collective settlement committed to writing.

The popular understanding expressed in 'Pañcanāmā' favours making documents, issuing receipts, and clearly demarcating boundaries to prevent future trouble. In the reflections, the king settles disputes among his subjects, but the legal standing of his orders is not examined. Two modes of justice

consequently coexist within Safi's collection: trust in a moral personality and the written regulation of social procedure.

A conclusion for literary criticism follows: ideas are not always organised uniformly throughout a single author's five-part book. Sometimes he remembers tradition; elsewhere he praises documented practice. Such difference should not simply be taken as authorial incompetence, but understood as the layered quality of his lived world, while the contradiction itself remains on record.

25. *Ogarbāh* and *Rājā Aor Parajā*: Two Discourses on Labour

The short story *Ogarbāh* depicts an elderly crop watcher's lack of food and anxiety about agricultural change. The reflections discuss owners' distribution of grain, workers' migration, and the disappearance of mutual assistance. The material worlds of both—paddy, fields, food, wages, village—overlap, but their literary forms differ. *Ogarbāh* begins with an individual situation and an expanding narration, whereas *Rājā Aor Parajā* opens with sentences approaching propositions of social theory.

The crisis is not one-dimensional in either. The person producing grain may remain hungry, while the owner of a granary may behave generously or selfishly. The question of entitlement to food connects these contradictions. The writer's serious achievement is to think through the ethical meanings of society in the vocabulary of land and labour, rather than merely composing abstract moral dicta.

As in *Ogarbāh*, however, a didactic voice in the reflections sometimes overwhelms the delicacy of experience. Compressing the entirety of social life into the simple formula 'the past was good, the present is bad' leaves too little space for divergent histories of wages, land relations, and the aspirations of new generations. Both works share this artistic challenge.

26. Style: Recurrence, Vernacular Speech, and Uncertainty of Argument

The language of *Rājā Aor Parajā* follows the movement of oral conversation more than the disciplined progression of paragraphs in a learned essay. Between signals such as 'formerly', 'now', and 'look', memory, commentary, and ethical questioning are joined. Argument passes from one paragraph to the next sometimes smoothly, sometimes abruptly. The narratorial intimacy is therefore strong, but the successive stages of analysis are not equally concentrated throughout.

In the flow of popular speech, questions of equality, compassion, and the value of labour arise naturally. Readers can grasp the informal political economy of society without academic definition. That is a genuine linguistic strength. Just as village speakers connect incidents of history, talk of fields, moral disapproval,

and religious analogies in everyday conversation, the style is shaped by these associations.

Yet the intellectual effect could have been stronger with more restraint in repetition, more deliberate examples, better developed objections, and a more explicit conclusion. The final image proposes equality of food, but does not resolve the opening questions of kingly justice and workers' rights. Openness of style becomes an openness of questions.

27. An Epistemological Re-Reading: Statement, Inference, and Evidence

Not every assertion in this reflective piece has the same evidentiary status. Some are founded on popular memory, some on the authorial speaker's values, others summarise general social experience, and still others derive from Mithilā's cultural narratives. These distinctions are essential to criticism. For example, the payment of wages in grain indicates a form of social experience; a broad proposition such as 'all the kings of former times were just' would require separate historical material.

In the general vocabulary of the theories of knowledge developed in Mithilā, one might say that direct experience and memory, inference, received testimony, and figurative analogy make different kinds of claims to knowledge. This does not mean imposing a rigid external philosophical scheme upon the composition. It is simply a critical instrument: which assertions are supported within the text, and where does the writer's affective conviction enter?

Such a method does not diminish the work's importance. On the contrary, it makes possible both respect for the emotional truth of folk memory and caution about factual claims. Janaka's sacrifice is a literary symbol; labourers' migration is an account of social experience; the king's generosity is an ethical ideal; and universal equality in access to food is a contestable generalisation. Without these distinctions, neither sociological conclusions nor literary interpretation can be just.

28. Parallel Literature and a Place in Literary History

Videha's publication archives establish Safi's autobiography as an important early achievement in Maithili Dalit life writing. In that historical context, the reflections deserve attention: the author becomes more than a subject of writing about his community or his life; he becomes a speaker on the moral principles of society. The value of *Rājā Aor Parajā* lies not simply in the originality of its content but in the right to utter it publicly.

The project of parallel literature cannot become an automatic certificate of literary merit. If the work of a Dalit writer is to find its rightful place in literary history, its paragraphs, voices, imagination, factual limits, and social theory should be subjected to criticism as rigorous as that applied to any other writer.

Genuine literary inclusion becomes possible only through this equality of critical treatment.

From this standpoint Safi's five-generic collection is a significant object of research. The autobiography narrates struggle; poetry creates folk scenes; *vihani kathā* open social dialogue; short stories depict the lives of labouring families; and the reflections debate the moral foundations of governance. Generic multiplicity extends the writer's public voice.

29. Achievements and Limitations: A Balanced Assessment

The first achievement of *Rājā Aor Parajā* is that it makes the relationship between rural authority and labour a subject of reflection in accessible vernacular prose. Second, it connects the ruler's duties with the cultural memory of Janaka, raising the question of moral responsibility. Third, it gives social difference concrete form through details of grain-based wages, rising prices, migration, land, and food. Fourth, by engaging with the other sections of the book, it enables readers to perceive the larger structures of labourers' lives.

Its limitations are also definite. Excessive idealisation of earlier times weakens the assessment of exploitation within the old order. Personal generosity is offered as though it were an alternative to rights. No explicit analysis of caste power is present; women and younger people have little independent voice. Generalisations about 'idleness' risk treating economic compulsion as a moral fault. The conclusion regarding equality of food lacks the evidence it would require. The form also suffers from insufficient restraint in recurrence and inadequate development of counterarguments.

To overlook these limitations would do the work an injustice. Literary respect does not oppose critical extension; it requires it. Safi has placed social questions before readers in the language of his own village, and that is a significant literary event. Readers may also seek answers different from the author's own.

30. Conclusion: From Compassionate Kingship to Rights-Based Justice

The central sensibility of *Rājā Aor Parajā*, the sole prose composition in the reflections section of *Baiśākhme Dalānpar*, is responsibility toward people who are hungry and insecure. The authorial speaker wishes wealthy or powerful people to recognise the distress of the weak, stand beside them in difficulty, and not fracture society through the pursuit of profit. The human meaning of this aspiration is beyond dispute. Janaka's ideal in Mithilā's popular memory gives that aspiration a cultural language.

Yet the question remains how independent the subjects' rights were in the era idealised by the text. A full day's labour for a little grain, landownership and unequal entitlement, migration from village to city, and women's unspoken work all point toward demands for social justice deeper than royal generosity. In

this sense, the work's greatest value lies not in its explicit solution but in its internal contradictions. Compassion is necessary, but the foundation of enduring justice must be rights and recognition of equal standing.

Read alongside Safi's autobiography, poetry, *vihani kathā*, and short stories, the reflections become the final extension of an ethical consideration of labouring life. After his own life journey, a Dalit writer questions Mithilā's society: how will those who produce grain, those who provide services, and those who leave their villages to find a means of survival obtain dignity, food, and justice? *Rājā Aor Parajā* does not fully answer the question, but makes it a subject of public literary debate. Its achievement demands a reading at once fair, critical, and sympathetic.

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PART 12

Nit Naval: Lallan Prasad Thakur

PART I · MAITHILI DRAMA / LITERARY CRITICISM 1

1. Baṛkā Sāheb

Office, Prestige, and the Forgotten Village: The Contradictions of Social Advancement in Lallan Prasad Thakur's Baṛkā Sāheb

Abstract

Lallan Prasad Thakur's *Baṛkā Sāheb* is not merely a theatrical tale of conflict between village relationships and urban prestige within a family. It analyses the paradox of social advancement in which the person who resists humiliation, upon acquiring an opportunity, becomes an imitator of the very system that generated it. The locked gate of officer Bālchandra Jhā's bungalow at the beginning and the new nameplate bearing Chūṛāmaṇi Jhā's official designation at the end are opposite ends of a single social cycle. Between them, merit, poverty, familial obligation, recommendations, prestige, dowry, language, and women's mediation come into conflict. This study closely reads the sequence of scenes, the characters' moral dilemmas, the social function of laughter, multilingual dialogue, stage directions, the meaning of objects, and the recapitulative structure of the final scene. The author's cultural commitments and their limitations must also be assessed, for speaking English or adopting a new way of life does not in itself establish moral decline. The problem arises where the grandeur of office displaces social memory, equal conduct, and accountability in relationships. The play's most powerful achievement is its final moral reversal; its chief limitations for consideration are certain overtly didactic signals and a homogeneous representation of modernity.

Keywords: Maithili drama; Lallan Prasad Thakur; *Baṛkā Sāheb*; migration; social prestige; theatrical language; dowry; satire; social reproduction.

1. Introduction: Society's Memory on the Stage

To take *Baṛkā Sāheb* simply as an ordinary conflict between village and city or tradition and modernity would diminish its political and dramatic depth. The word *baṛkā*, 'great' or 'important', does not designate an immutable quality: it is a social title constituted by rank, conduct, economic difference, access to authority, and the capacity to affect another person's self-respect. Bālchandra Jhā is an officer, so there is an external reason for calling him 'important'; the reader-spectator gradually understands, however, that the real issue is not his position but his social behaviour. The play does not confine the question to one

generation. The final scene passes the same language of importance into the hands of the next.

According to the account of the first performance placed at the beginning of the collected text, the play was staged on 20 November 1983 at Rabindra Bhavan, Jamshedpur, under the author's direction. The author himself played Chhedī Jhā. These details illuminate the work's collective theatrical life and the playwright's practical awareness of acting. The industrial city of Jamshedpur—where migrants from Mithilā negotiated language, caste connections, village memories, and new employment structures—provided a meaningful stage for its themes. This historical setting does not, however, mean that each dramatic incident must correspond to an episode in the author's private life; the internal evidence does not establish any such direct equivalence.

In Kusum Thakur's theatrical recollections, *Baṛkā Sāheb* is remembered in relation to the author's early dramatic attempts and his subsequent founding of the institution Mithilākṣar. A catalogue entry records a separate book in 1985; the work was later republished in a collected *Rachanāvalī*. Taken together, these witnesses show that, though an individual composition, the play belongs to the institutional history of Maithili theatre-making.

2. Plot Construction: From Gate to Nameplate

At the beginning, Chhedī Jhā arrives from the village with his gifted nephew Chūṛāmaṇi at the urban home of Bālchandra Jhā. The young man has studied well but has found no employment. Chhedī comes trusting in an old relationship, while Chūṛāmaṇi tries to balance his talent with his dignity. The locked bungalow gate, the obstruction imposed by the servant Bholā, and confusion over the inscription 'B. C. Jhā' on the nameplate make this entrance a dramatic introduction to social distance.

Mīnā's hospitality and Bālchandra's aversion establish the central tension. Mīnā recognises her husband's relatives, insists upon speaking Maithili, admires Chūṛāmaṇi's qualifications, and sees him both as a prospective employee and as a possible husband for her daughter Mikkī. Bālchandra wants distance from old relationships, village poverty, and social obligation. He invokes a moral principle against obtaining jobs by recommendation, but remains captive to pride in his rank and family standing.

For Chūṛāmaṇi's interview, Mīnā reaches Mr Varmā through Rānī Varmā, and the young man receives an appointment. Hearing Bālchandra's humiliating response, Chūṛāmaṇi tears up the letter of appointment. This is the play's first climax: merit and self-respect are placed above the acquisition of a position. Immediately comes news that he has passed a competitive administrative examination. Bālchandra's attitude changes, but the change is based not on the young man's ethical character, but on the prospect of his high official post and suitability as a son-in-law.

The play does not end there. The final scene presents a new nameplate and the silhouette of dancing to a Western tune; an offstage voice reports that Chūṛāmaṇi married Mikkī with a substantial sum of dowry and eventually became 'C. M. Jhā, I.A.S.', himself forgetting village, culture, and relationships. The B. C. Jhā of the opening and C. M. Jhā of the close are different persons, but represent the reproduction of the same social structure. Without this circular ending, the play would remain an ordinary story of a virtuous man's triumph; the ending makes it a serious social satire.

3. The Meaning of *Baṛkā*: Not Size, but Distance

The title *Baṛkā Sāheb* is suggestive. At first, seeing the enormous bungalow, Chhedī takes Bālchandra to be a 'great officer'. Grandeur arises at that instant from material display: the high gate, lock, car, position, servants, abbreviated English name, and command of time. Yet Chhedī's form of address 'Bālo' repeatedly summons the man from the old village inside the officer's prestigious identity. 'Bālo' versus 'B. C. Jhā' is thus not merely a choice of names but a conflict between social memory and self-fashioning through office.

Bālchandra most clearly discloses the absurdity of his grandeur when the huge bungalow becomes 'too small' to accommodate a guest. The house is objectively spacious but ethically diminished in its capacity for relationships. Conversely, Chhedī's torn umbrella, bundle, and ancestral water vessel, though signs of scant means, become visible tokens of a life bound to his own people. The playwright establishes the central opposition more effectively through conflicting objects and situations than through speeches.

A closed gate between merit and official prestige

Goffman's ideas concerning social self-presentation can offer limited interpretative assistance here. Bālchandra's modern bungalow, personal servant, and carefully regulated visiting hours are the stage properties of his public persona. This sociological analogy does not mean that his entire personality is only a performance; the drama specifically exposes the moment at which public dignity becomes a screen for familial insensitivity.

4. Chhedī Jhā: Guardian of Popular Memory and Its Limits

Chhedī Jhā provides the play's comic energy. His calls of 'Bālo', mistaken expansions of English initials, disputes with Bholā, annoyance at the request for a food order before eating, and description of 'lunch' as 'a contrivance' are not merely jokes. Within the laughter one hears the discomfort of a man unfamiliar with urban rules and official etiquette, who is nonetheless unwilling to surrender his claim to closeness.

Chhedī carries a long memory of relationships. He recalls Bālchandra's father, Chūṛāmaṇi's deceased father Chintāmaṇi, their old friendship, and a promise concerning marriage made in childhood. He speaks of the difficulty of raising and educating his nephew. His appeal is therefore more than a private request for patronage: it is a plea expressed in the language of communal village obligation. The clash between modern merit and mutual assistance is not artificial here. A qualified young man still lacks opportunity in the labour market, and an old relationship may become a means of acquiring one.

Yet it would be wrong to make Chhedī a morally impeccable centre. His remarks about Mikkī's dress and freedom of speech, his ridicule of marriages based on love, and his insistence on an old promise resembling child-marriage custom also represent social orthodoxy. One of the play's most instructive features is that Chhedī's resistance to inequality coexists with intolerance concerning gender and generations. His human worth does not automatically validate all his opinions. Acknowledging this duality makes him a living character rather than a mere emblem of tradition.

5. Chūṛāmaṇi: The Achievement of Merit and an Incomplete Moral Victory

Chūṛāmaṇi is an exceptionally qualified young man educated to the M.A. level. His mother's straitened household, his private tutoring to finance education, an unsuccessful search for employment, and preparation for an administrative competitive examination give his character social detail beyond the generic figure of 'poor talent'. Initially he tries to curb his uncle's uncontrolled anger, recognises rational aspects of urban change, and responds courteously to Mīnā's affection.

The tearing of the appointment letter is not an empty explosive gesture; it responds to humiliation accumulated beforehand. Chūṛāmaṇi has heard that his employment, possible visit, and poverty are regarded as problems by the officer. Thanking Mīnā but bearing the burden of insult himself, he tears the paper. The act has ethical force as an assertion of self-respect, but does not amount to complete autonomy. The appointment itself had been influenced by an informal family network, and tearing the letter does not create an alternative to an unequal recruitment system; it only establishes personal distance.

Success in the administrative examination is immediately satisfying, exposing the falsity of Bālchandra's judgment. The final scene, however, demonstrates the ethical insufficiency of that success. Having attained high office, Chūṛāmaṇi cannot sustain his earlier opposition to the very consciousness of rank that he once rejected. His is therefore not a straightforward victory but a story joining 'advancement and oblivion'. The intervening transition in his character is insufficiently dramatised—an artistic limitation—yet the final pattern creates a sharp satirical effect in the work's larger structure.

6. Bālchandra Jhā: The Language of Principle and the Practice of Convenience

Bālchandra asserts that securing employment through influence is contrary to his principles. Considered separately, that claim appears just: impartial recruitment ought to be foundational to public institutions. The play, however, tests the assertion against its context. Bālchandra sees village people as 'selfish', refuses to accommodate visitors, mocks the young man's dignity, and makes economic standing the decisive criterion of suitability for marriage within his

family. Against this background, his 'principle' seems less a concern for equality than protection of his convenience.

The inconsistency becomes particularly clear when Mīnā's parents arrive at the station and Bālchandra himself takes the car to collect them. His refusal of hospitality is not a universal rule; it depends on the guest's social status and familial proximity. Mīnā also remembers his help in obtaining employment for another officer's nephew. The play thus opens a gap between the language of opposition to corruption and selective access to influence.

Bālchandra's instant transformation upon Chūṛāmaṇi's success in the administrative examination is final evidence of class selectivity. The young man previously considered poor and undesirable suddenly becomes a suitable match for the daughter. His independent judgment is not respected: the future office matters. Bālchandra's supposed repentance is not therefore a full moral awakening, but something like a revised result in his calculation of prestige.

7. Mīnā and Rānī: Women's Mediation, Ethical Labour, and the Dowry Contradiction

The play's action cannot proceed without Mīnā. She ensures the guests' entry, makes Bholā apologise, insists that Mikkī speak Maithili, recognises Chūṛāmaṇi's ability, opposes Bālchandra's neglect while bearing it, and finally arranges help with employment through Rānī. In all these events, the woman supposedly confined to the domestic 'inside' actually manages the social relationships.

Mīnā's particular strength lies in the ethical judgment of her dialogue. She tells Bālchandra that not every rural visitor is self-interested and that urban brilliance cannot replace relationships when times become difficult. Yet her route to social resistance is not institutional reform but a network of friendship with an official's wife. It provides immediate practical help, while leaving the unequal structure of opportunity intact.

To dismiss Rānī as Mīnā's amusing friend is to underrate her use in the play. She promises to exert moral pressure upon her husband's official position, and recognises the domestic habit of blaming women. 'Women's support' becomes an informal administrative channel. No just system emerges from this channel, however, and Varmā's selection and explanation expose its instability as well.

The report of dowry in the final scene complicates Mīnā's generosity. Her earlier willingness to recognise a poor young man for his talent is commendable, but the marriage eventually takes place with 'a substantial dowry payment'. Here the play reveals a familial contradiction: the languages of affection and keeping one's word are not exempt from economic transactions. The offstage voice presents dowry not as a separate declaration of condemnation but as a fact of what occurred; criticism must draw out its significance.

8. Mikkī, Vikkī, and Modernity: Disputes over Language, Body, and Generation

Mikkī speaks English, mocks Chūṛāmaṇi's rustic clothes, and rejects a childhood promise of marriage. The first two behaviours reveal class arrogance; the third also raises the question of a young woman's freedom to decide whom she marries. Criticism that makes Mikkī merely an example of 'Western cultural degeneration' overlooks this essential distinction. Her right not to marry someone and her conduct in humiliating a person for being poor are not the same matter.

Vikkī, as a small child, playfully raises disputes over the form of address 'Bābā', the custom of touching feet in greeting, and the significance of names. He touches his own feet as a greeting; Chhedī becomes agitated by the child's remarks on his name. Within the humour of this exchange, generational distance becomes entangled with mistrust of language education and imitation. The child is not a moral villain: he repeats conduct learned in his household. Once the social meaning of his apparently spontaneous talk is understood, the theatrical humour becomes more serious.

The play criticises modernity, but modernity is not singular. Education, women's participation in public dialogue, cross-linguistic contact, and mobility in employment are also positive possibilities of modern life. Its satire finds its proper target when economic arrogance, linguistic contempt, and the forgetting of relationships accompany these developments. The strongest reading therefore tests the class-specific uses of modernity through ethical judgment rather than rejecting modernity outright.

9. Bholā and Mr Varmā: Satirical Voices of Subordination

Bholā is a household servant, yet his frequently repeated 'māne ki' ('that is to say') gives his dialogue a characteristic rhythm. At first he bars the visitors, becoming a miniature representative of the officer's authority; later he admits them at the mistress's command. His language shows that official standing shapes not only the officer but also the servant's conduct. Looking down upon people of his own social level, Bholā imitates contempt even while remaining subordinate within the same household order.

Mr Varmā's humour is more disquieting. Speaking of Bholā's possible marriage, he refers to the servant's future wife as though her person were an object of transaction. The exchange may produce laughter on stage, but critical reading exposes an officer's sense of masculine entitlement to a woman's body. It would be wrong to normalise this element of humour simply as a joke accepted in its time. Through his characters, the playwright brings an unpleasant aspect of social appetite onto the stage, even if explicit opposition in the dialogue remains limited.

Mr Varmā wields decisive authority over the interview. He is shown speaking casually about choosing a candidate; Chūṛāmaṇi's assertion of self-respect subsequently exposes the moral defect of the arrangement. Varmā praises the young man's dignity, but that praise does not answer the partiality of the recruitment process he has himself used. The satire's particular power is to disclose this contradiction almost incidentally within a single dramatic situation.

10. The Language of the Stage: Maithili, English, and the Marketplace of Prestige

The language of *Baṛkā Sāheb* is multilayered. Chhedī's everyday Maithili, Chūṛāmaṇi's reasoned speech, Mīnā's courteous and articulate Maithili, Bholā's mixed idiom, Bālchandra's English expressions, and the children's linguistic display together create an audible map of social stratification. The theatricality of the dialogue lies in spectators' ability to hear the differences in the characters' social positions as they listen to what is said.

The conversion of 'B. C.' into 'besī' ('more'), 'lunch' into 'prapañc' ('contrivance'), and Chhedī's recasting of 'love marriage' as 'Lailā marriage' generates initial laughter through linguistic misunderstanding. But the humour contains questions about authority over meaning. Who can pronounce their own vocabulary correct? Whose language confers professional prestige? Who becomes laughable through misunderstanding? These questions make linguistic comedy an instrument of social criticism.

Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital provides a useful comparative perspective. English may function in the drama not merely as a medium of communication but as a sign of official prestige, while Maithili is more than a mother tongue: it reawakens memories of intimate relationships. Yet a language's worth depends upon how it is used ethically. A person speaking Maithili is not invariably generous, nor is an English speaker necessarily insensitive. Chūṛāmaṇi himself understands some features of urban conduct in relative terms. This complexity enables readers to consider the relationship between preserving a language and protecting human dignity with greater maturity.

Mīnā's insistence that Maithili be spoken at home is particularly notable. Rather than turning the language into a declaration of negative purism, she tries to give it a place in everyday relationships. Bālchandra, conversely, feels uncomfortable hearing Mithilā's song traditions and plays an English tune. The change of music is not simply a transition between scenes; it is a visible dramatic action within the contest over cultural authority in the home.

11. Stage Design and the Significance of Objects: Society within the Theatre

The playwright directs that the stage be divided into two principal areas: the bungalow's external veranda and its interior drawing room. White curtains, silhouettes, changes of lighting, musical introductions of the characters, and the final shadow image of dancing reveal that the author does not conceive the text apart from performance. The division of space is dramatically meaningful. Relatives wait outside, while the official and his family decide matters inside. Spatial separation becomes the separation of power and access.

The gate's lock is the opening sign of authority. Chhedī's patched umbrella, bundle, and water vessel are a visible language of travel, poverty, and the earlier way of life. Inside the house, a tape recorder, modern furniture, cigarettes, the sound of a car, and drinking glasses signify lifestyle. The disparity of objects is immediately visible on stage, rather than merely conveyed as information to a reader. What begins with the word *baṛkā* acquires its complete theatrical vocabulary through the arrangement of objects.

Especially noteworthy is the action of tearing the appointment letter. After a long dispute over employment, Chūṛāmaṇi tears a piece of paper on stage, converting abstract self-respect into visible action. Likewise, changing the nameplate at the close bridges dramatic time and establishes a later social outcome in an instant. These two actions are among the most successful instruments of the author's theatrical imagination.

The author indicates that the fourth scene may be omitted and some roles reduced in the sixth scene to shorten the performance. This practical flexibility is noteworthy. From the perspective of the complete text, however, removing the fourth scene weakens the satire of children's naming and language, while reducing the scene involving Mīnā's parents diminishes the sharpness of the household's selective hospitality toward in-laws. A director should therefore decide consciously between convenience in performance and completeness of meaning.

12. Song, Offstage Voice, and the Structure of Satire

The opening ensemble song, 'Wherever you look, wherever you look, everyone is a great officer' ('जेम्हरे देखू तेम्हरे देखू, सभ छथि बड़का साहेब'), announces the play's ideological theme at once. The accusation of forgetting village, society, custom, convention, and soil expands beyond the individual Bālchandra toward a wider social pattern. Thus the song serves not only as an opening but as an anticipation of the irony to come.

Yet the song also suggests in advance how spectators should interpret the characters' future. From the standpoint of theatrical poetics, such an explicit announcement can sometimes diminish the freedom of dramatic discovery. If audiences are told beforehand that people forget their villages after gaining

modern office, the possibilities of exploring Bālchandra's behaviour in all its complexity are limited. The writer counterbalances this danger with Chūṛāmaṇi's self-respect and the unexpected recurrence at the close.

The final offstage voice likewise supplies a direct ethical interpretation. The transformation of the nameplate and shadow dancing possess adequate suggestive force in themselves, and extensive narration overexplains the image slightly. Yet the offstage mention of a 'substantial sum of dowry' is an uncomfortable detail whose omission would weaken the play's critical edge. The problem is not the existence of the offstage voice, but the proportion between visual suggestion and verbal explanation.

13. Merit, Recommendation, and the Public Good: An Ethical Entanglement

The issue of appointment produces a difficult ethical triangle. Chūṛāmaṇi is talented but cannot secure an opportunity; old village connections generate the expectation of assistance; the officer invokes impartiality to cover personal neglect. Had Bālchandra genuinely supported recruitment by rules, he would have ensured an impartial process in which qualifications determined the choice. Instead, he calls keeping his distance from Chūṛāmaṇi a 'principle'. Conversely, the covert intervention of Mīnā and the Varmās protects the young man's immediate interests but renders a public process opaque.

The implicit question remains entirely contemporary: without changing a system that compels people to seek opportunities through personal ties, neither a charitable individual nor a rigidly self-proclaimed man of principle can resolve the ethical problem. The characters' circumstances require merit, self-respect, and institutional justice to be considered together. Chūṛāmaṇi's tearing of the letter is an intense personal response to the crisis, not an institutional plan for resolving it.

The marriage arranged through dowry extends this contradiction socially. Once an official post becomes valuable capital, it acquires an exchange value in money within marital relations. The young man's poverty, initially an obstacle to marriage, ultimately gives way to his administrative prospects as a means of preserving family prestige. Through this conflict, the drama becomes not simply a manifesto of love for a language but a story about unequal exchanges of opportunity and status.

14. Realism, Stereotypes, and Critical Reservations

The satire's power arises from social bitterness, but its limits of realism also need recognition. The sequence by which a character is poor, passes a high-level examination, and immediately becomes marriageable provides a rapid theatrical reversal but distances viewers from the numerous long-term difficulties of social advancement. The final irony overturns this simplification, yet the internal stages of Chūṛāmaṇi's transformation remain inadequately dramatised.

The play's idealisation of village life and generalised condemnation of a Western lifestyle raise critical questions. There is no extensive depiction of how rural inequalities, control over women's marriage choices, and caste hierarchies operate. If Chhedī's affectionate forms of address and seniority are accepted as incontestable moral truths, Mikkī's self-determination is suppressed. A distinction must be maintained between preserving memory of the past and reimposing every rule of that past.

Likewise, the social field of the principal household is comparatively narrow. The closing offstage voice adds several surnames to suggest the spread of the tendency, but the central experience remains within a powerful family and its immediate connections. The servant Bholā is present, but his independent wishes are not explored at length. These limitations do not erase the play's central critique; they delimit the reach of its social vision.

Despite these reservations, *Baṛkā Sāheb* is notable for refusing to preserve its self-respecting young man as an object of unquestioning reverence at the end. By showing his decline, the playwright deprives audiences of the easy satisfaction of selecting a permanent moral victor. Through this dramatic courage, the composition passes beyond its didactic surface to become a serious text on memory, power, and recurrence.

15. Theatrical Tradition and Restaging: The Work's Continuing Life

Kusum Thakur's affectionate memoir illuminates the institutional struggle associated with the playwright's earliest theatrical experiences. According to her account, the experience of *Baṛkā Sāheb* encouraged him toward establishing an independent theatrical institution. The memoir does not supply an unquestionable measure of the play's critical reception, but it is important eyewitness evidence for theatre history. It helps explain the work's relations with performers, rehearsal pressures, and motivation for institution building.

A report appeared concerning a performance of the play by Bhangimā at Vidyāpati Bhavan, Patna, in 2025. According to the report, Rashmi Mishra directed it. The public notice establishes that the play continued to be read and performed; it does not, by itself, justify a detailed evaluation of acting, lighting, or audience response at that particular production. That would require a separate study of the actual staging.

Raymond Williams's approach to theatrical analysis makes it productive to read a play not as a text completed on paper but as a structure of potential performances. *Baṛkā Sāheb* already specifies outer and inner spaces, songs, shadows, stage darkness, objects, and entrances and exits. Its theatrical possibilities are therefore inseparable from its subject matter. Through this stagecraft, social criticism becomes not merely dialogue but a situation to be seen and experienced.

16. Conclusion: The Meaning of the Final Nameplate

Lallan Prasad Thakur's *Baṛkā Sāheb* centres its plot on the question of how far a person can retain the memory of earlier relationships after attaining office. The opening gate is a material form of social distance; Chūṛāmaṇi's torn appointment letter is the climactic sign of ethical resistance; and the changed nameplate at the close is the failed social outcome of that resistance. The play's argument is organised between these three visual points.

Chhedī's affection is not free of orthodoxy; Mīnā's commitment to helping is not free of the system of recommendations; Chūṛāmaṇi's merit is not free of the lure of power; and Bālchandra's principles are not free of selective convenience. In this world of imperfect characters, social morality ceases to be a single person's quality and becomes a matter of continuous testing. The satire consequently reaches beyond individual failure toward a cycle of social advancement that regenerates an old arrogance in its new beneficiaries.

Even acknowledging the work's occasional ideological simplifications, its conflicted handling of female autonomy, and the over-explicit final voice-over, *Baṛkā Sāheb* can be read as an important work of Maithili social theatre. Its principal achievement is not to offer the easy verdict 'village good, city bad'. Its most severe question is this: what prevents the person we see wounded by humiliation today from becoming the agent of the same humiliation tomorrow? The play's final shadow leaves that question in the spectators' memory.

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2. Lauṅgiyā Mirchāi

The Taste of Bitterness and the Mirage of Prestige: A Critique of Dowry, Class, Familial Estrangement and Theatrical Satire in Lallan Prasad Thakur's *Lauṅgiyā Mirchāi*

Abstract

Lallan Prasad Thakur's *Lauṅgiyā Mirchāi* is a work of modern Maithili drama in which the marriage market, the symbolic value of government office, the overt and covert forms of dowry, the self-contradictions of the educated middle class, the moral presence of an impoverished child, and the widening distance between village and city become inextricably entangled. The play's central conflict does not lie merely in the difference between a wealthy and an impoverished family, but in the interval between professed values and actual conduct, through which even familial affection becomes an object of prestige. The dramatist identifies the intermediary Ghūṭar through the folk comparison of the *lauṅgiyā mirchāi*: what excites a desire for flavour ultimately produces intolerable pungency. Divākar's manoeuvre of turning a supposedly philanthropic gift of fifty thousand rupees into a route to marriage, the anti-dowry Master's insistence on "status," Narendra's gratitude and helplessness, Rītā's consumerist aspirations and class cruelty, and the relations of labour disclosed through Genā and Raśmiyā together fashion a multilayered social drama. The humour of the dialogue gradually becomes a poignant tension; at the end, the teacher who has lost his place of respect within his own home departs, depending on the shoulder of a child. The present study examines the play's accomplishments and ideological limitations through close reading, dialogue analysis, an examination of theatrical space, and circumspect social criticism.

Keywords: Maithili drama; Lallan Prasad Thakur; *Lauṅgiyā Mirchāi*; dowry; official prestige; theatrical satire; class; village and city; child character; stagecraft.

1. Composition, Theatrical Tradition, and the Basis of the Study

When the social current of modern Maithili theatre takes educated families, occupational displacement, the ethics of the market, and the crises of new lifestyles as its subjects, the distance between the household and public institutions widens within dramatic narrative. *Lauṅgiyā Mirchāi* discloses that distance not by direct declamation but through a succession of calamities beginning with a marriage proposal. The characters' positions, incomes, places of

residence, and familial relations come into contact, yet their moral standards no longer coincide. The Master's thatched home, a government engineer's affluence, the urban residence of Narendra after he becomes an officer, a maidservant's room, and the humiliation of an ailing elder brother together constitute the play's social geography.

Kusum Thakur's memoir connects the play's composition with an invitation to an international drama competition in 1986. According to that account, the title was decided first, followed by the characters and the opening scene; the pressure of rehearsal prompted the completion of the remaining play in a single night. This memoir constitutes the testimony of recollected first-hand experience, not a substitute for the dramatic text. Bibliographical information is also available for an independent 1988 edition of *Lauṅgiyā Mirchāi*, published by Bhawani Prakashan, Patna; the present study principally draws upon the complete play preserved in the collection edited by Dr Prakash Jha.

One notable aspect of the play's theatrical life is the availability of information about a new production long after its composition. An announcement was published of a staging by the Mithila Sanskritik Parishad, Bokaro, on the occasion of the Vidyapati Memorial Festival. Such reports suggest the work's persistence in public memory and its renewed theatrical use; an announced programme, however, should not be mistaken for independent evidence that the performance actually took place.

2. *Lauṅgiyā Mirchāi*: The Critical Principle Concealed in the Title

When his name becomes an object of ridicule, Ghūṭar explains that *lauṅgiyā mirchāi* grows profusely in his garden and that people pluck it and take it away. On hearing this outwardly innocent explanation, the audience begins to understand the title's submerged meaning: the intermediary who produces a burning sensation markets his own "flavour" as an achievement. From the outset Phūknā addresses Ghūṭar by this nickname, but its deeper intellectual significance is made explicit much later by Chandrakānt: everyone is tempted to eat it, yet once eaten it burns so fiercely that one begins to weep.

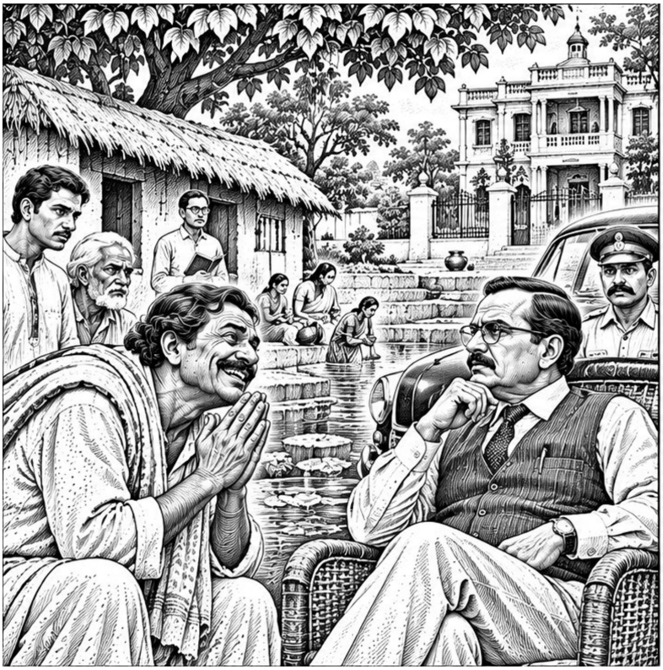
The title's strength is that it does not merely ridicule an individual; it becomes a metaphor for the bitter consequences of the sweet enticements circulating through social relationships. Ghūṭar's brokerage initially provides the pleasures of food, hospitality, travel, and money; its later fruits are domestic instability, humiliation, and distrust. In this sense the chilli is at once a foodstuff and a socially destructive mixture. At the end Chandrakānt brings Rītā within the scope of the same comparison. Through this extension, the folk metaphor moves beyond an individual nickname to designate a social disposition.

It would nevertheless be unjust to attribute every source of the play's "bitterness" to Ghūṭar. He is an opportunist, but the economic and cultural ground that makes him influential has already been prepared. The conception of marriage as purchase and sale, the pricing of an officer's prospective income, and the

educated family's infatuation with prestige enable his stratagems to succeed. The title acquires its more searching critical meaning when Ghūṭar is read as symptom as well as cause.

3. The Opening: The Village Encounters Corrupt Affluence at the Pond Ghat

The first scene unfolds at a pond-side bathing ghat. The encounter between Ghūṭar, who has bathed and is reciting the *Durgāpāṭh*, and the engineer Divākar, who arrives by car, contains the germ of the play's entire satirical design. The motorcar entering the village signifies the arrival of a new affluence; Ghūṭar immediately recognises an opportunity. Divākar brings a letter from Ghūṭar's brother-in-law and makes a marriage proposal. The letter lists, together, the education and beauty of Divākar's daughter Rītā, her competence in housework, and her family's wealth; finally, it also hints at a "commission" for the intermediary. At precisely this point, the sacred social relationship of marriage is translated into the vocabulary of commercial exchange.



The pond ghat: brokerage at the threshold of affluence

Ghūṭar does not deny the awkwardness of the word "commission" in the letter; he simply recasts it in the polite phrase "welcome and hospitality." Changing the words does not alter the transaction, but it provides a covering for moral objections. In this small episode the playwright shows how the language of public corruption appropriates the vocabulary of private social propriety. Even

while reciting the *Durgāpāṭh*, Ghūṭar's devotion turns towards the remembrance of Lakṣmī as soon as money appears. This is not a critique of religion as such, but a satirical exposure of the disposition that makes religious language a cloak for self-interest.

For Divākar, Narendra's future income and authority constitute the attraction of the match. Offers of fifty thousand, one lakh, and one and a half to two lakh rupees become not an assessment of the prospective groom's education but the market value of his future access to administration. Ghūṭar is astonished by the deprivation of Narendra's household, whereas Divākar understands that a future income-tax officer could hold numerous engineers under his influence. In this formulation, the possible misuse of state authority enters the calculations of the marriage market. It is here that the play delivers its first incisive stroke of economic satire.

4. The Master's Household: Moral Labour, Poverty, and Human Dignity

Inside the village's thatched home the Master's order of values is established. A broken chair, a cot, a mat, and a pupil's schoolbag are signs of an educational world lacking material wealth but not reciprocal responsibility. The Master has laboured for years to educate his younger brother; at the same time he has devoted himself to the schooling of Genā, the gifted son of the impoverished Phūknā. He takes pride in Narendra's success, but his enthusiasm for Genā's education is equally genuine and spontaneous.

The Master's wife represents a simple but alert moral intelligence. She understands the harmful consequences of dowry and advises that Narendra marry a daughter of a poor family. The Master reiterates his opposition to dowry, but immediately adds that an officer's marriage must take "status" into account. That single word captures the work's central contradiction: the resolve not to accept money coexists with a desire for alliance with a rich and highly placed family. The playwright reveals the contradiction not through a character's formal confession but through an ordinary conversation between husband and wife. Consequently this moral failing seems living and credible.

It would be mistaken to dismiss the Master merely as a hypocrite. His disposition is generous, his affection for children genuine, and his sacrifices for the family real. His error lies in placing the symbol of prestige above human compatibility. This is not the "fall of an ideal man" but the tragedy of a well-intentioned person whose social judgment is limited. The dramatic achievement lies in the audience's capacity to maintain distance from the culpable characters without withdrawing its sympathy from the Master.

5. The Currency of Benefaction: The Moral Riddle of Fifty Thousand Rupees

Divākar does not directly state a prospective demand for dowry. Instead he recalls his former teacher Maheś Bābū, whose affection enabled his education and who spent his lifetime earnings educating poor students. Invoking this memory, he lays fifty thousand rupees at the Master's feet and asks that a fund for needy pupils be established. The Master initially refuses the money, but yields to the emotional entreaty and the account of repaying a moral debt.

The narrative manoeuvre here is exceptionally subtle. The gesture of benefaction could in itself have remained disinterested; in the next scene, however, Divākar explicitly instructs Ghūṭar to spread the word through the village that the marriage has been settled for one lakh rupees. Money given in the expectation of a subsequent marriage agreement ceases to be an unselfish donation. Its condition is not written down but prepared as social pressure. The manoeuvre of having "cast the bait" and ensuring that the other party "will have to be trapped" discloses the inner meaning of Divākar's supposed generosity.

The episode should nevertheless not be reduced to an uncomplicated instance of bribery. Within the play the languages of dowry, grant, benefaction, debt, blessing, gift, and commission overlap. The Master deposits the sum in a bank; for the wedding he spends his household savings and provident fund. The intention of the giver differs from that of the recipient, while the social world interprets the result on its own terms. The irony is that money made to appear a "pure" gift becomes a seed of mistrust instead of resolving a real moral crisis.

6. The Marriage Market: The Groom's Office, the Bride's "Qualifications," and Class Aspiration

In the marriage proposal, Rītā's attributes precede her name: education, appearance, domestic accomplishment, and her father's prosperity. Narendra is primarily identified by the prospect of becoming an "income-tax officer." The pairing is made not through a conversation about affection or mutual consent but through the comparison of social capital. Both households see marriage as an opportunity for moral and social advancement, but "advancement" has a different meaning for each. For the Master, an affluent family opens a door to greater respectability; for Divākar, kinship with a prospective tax officer is a means of economic-administrative protection and prestige.

The full material meaning of such a marriage is not restricted to a husband's earnings or the sum of dowry. Elite habits of living, the urban home, private conveniences, governmental standing, signs of consumption, and social networks all enter its undeclared bargain. Chandrakānt later identifies a second form of the same distortion: even a refusal to take direct dowry can become equally destructive if it turns into a craving for "status." The play draws this conclusion at the end, but its foundations have been laid at the beginning.

7. Ghūṭar: Intermediary, Broker, and Dialectical Protagonist of Folk Humour

Ghūṭar is a constantly present figure. He arranges and manipulates the marriage, spreads rumours, seeks opportunities to eat and drink, cultivates intimacy with the new household, and exploits his knowledge of the covert destruction of letters. His repeated exclamation "Durgā, Durgā" has many functions: fear, punctuation, hypocrisy, surprise, self-defence, and greed all find expression through a single sound. This repetition supplies concrete material for performance; a change of pitch or rhythm in differing circumstances changes its meaning.

Ghūṭar's cleverness is a principal source of comedy, but his violence is primarily verbal and relational. He filters information before transmitting it and misrepresents one person's intentions to another. His failure to communicate news of the Master's suffering to Narendra in time, his knowing silence about Rītā's suppression of letters, his conversion of a suspected illness into panic, and his endorsement of placing the patient in a servant's room all demonstrate that he is not merely a comic character: he actively intensifies the plot's real crisis.

Care is needed in performing this character. Presenting him only as an exaggerated fool would conceal his calculated self-interest; presenting him with nothing but villainous gravity would weaken the force of Maithili folk satire. It is more illuminating to play him as someone who recognises everyone's vulnerabilities, fears, and desires and profits from them. His power rests as much in the frailty of social consent as in his individual ingenuity.

8. Phūknā: A Warning from the Margins of Labour

Phūknā is a working character situated low in the socioeconomic hierarchy. He performs domestic work for the Master, who educates his son Genā. From the first scene Phūknā understands the connection between Ghūṭar's stratagems and his nickname. While highly educated and prestigious characters succumb to the lure of prospective wealth, Phūknā perceives that the rich marriage proposal arriving with "Lauṅgiyā Mirchāi" may precipitate disaster.

This arrangement is not simply an easy reversal of the traditional hierarchy of intelligence: Phūknā is not without flaws, is regarded as unpolished in speech and social manners, and finds his warnings repeatedly dismissed by the Master. Yet his knowledge derived from experience recognises signs of danger from the beginning. Reading the play exclusively as the moral history of the educated middle class would erase Phūknā's critical place in it. Onstage the confrontations between Ghūṭar and Phūknā produce folk humour, but they also conceal a question about the class-based allocation of credibility.

9. Chandrakānt: The Limited Dramatic Intervention of Critical Consciousness

Chandrakānt is a professor who resigns in disgust at the university environment. His entrance is important to the play's ideological perspective. Commenting on factionalism in educational institutions, he speaks of settling in a village; against this background he hears rumours about the marriage and questions the Master. His moral criterion is uncompromising: he will not participate in a wedding involving financial transactions. Once he hears the Master's explanation, the disagreement moves beyond private friendship to become a matter of social judgment.

In later scenes Chandrakānt takes the ailing Master to the city for treatment, exposes Ghūṭar's conspiracy, and finally explains the dangers of a marriage chosen in the name of "status." He functions almost as the play's internal critic, although his dialogue does not invariably maintain artistic restraint. At several points the dramatist's general social conclusions are spoken directly through Chandrakānt. This gives the argument clarity, but may somewhat diminish the audience's space for drawing independent conclusions.

10. Narendra's Resistance and Incapacity

It would misrepresent the text to dismiss Narendra as an ungrateful younger brother acting like an ungrateful son. He is grateful to his elder brother and sister-in-law, wishes to send financial assistance, and remains attached to the memory of home. After his marriage, however, he is caught among the everyday expenses of urban life, his wife's dissatisfaction, the pressure of prestige, and his own indecision. When he wishes to send his brother the money he has kept in his pocket, Rītā has already spent it. He is disheartened, yet offers no immediate, effective resistance.

Narendra's weakness arises less from a lack of moral understanding than from the delay in turning understanding into action. Only very late does he act upon learning that the letters of his brother and sister-in-law did not reach him. Even at the point of crisis, his decision erupts as a slap directed at Rītā—an act of violence that resolves nothing and deepens the crisis. The text consequently does not absolve Narendra completely by declaring him a "good man." Grateful remembrance of his brother coexists within him with a violent impulse towards his wife; that complexity is indispensable to a critical reading of the play.

11. Rītā: Consumerist Aspiration, Suppressed Letters, and the Risks of Interpretation

Rītā is among the play's most contentious character constructions. The daughter of a prosperous government officer, she is educated and expects her married life to conform to urban comfort. A refrigerator, clothing, home furnishings, favours that procure conveniences, and the lifestyle of senior officials occupy

prominent places in her imagination. Yet the dramatist does not stop at showing a desire to consume: in pursuing it, Rītā tears up her husband's family letters, suppresses news of illness, and beats the impoverished minor Raśmiyā. These actions are violent in themselves and morally reprehensible.

To infer from them that the educated "modern" woman naturally destroys the household would, however, diminish the play's experience. Divākar, Ghūṭar, the Master, and Narendra have participated equally in creating the marital structure that nurtures Rītā's desires. She herself has grown up in an ethos that treats wealth, office, and public display as essential qualifications for marriage. The play does not develop her autonomy as an independent vision of life; she becomes chiefly the medium of demands for luxury, insensitivity, and resistance. This representation risks perpetuating an anti-woman stereotype, which criticism must clearly identify.

Nor is it adequate to portray Rītā as morally uniform in contrast to the male characters. At moments she expresses a sense of humiliation and marital inequality, although that perception cannot excuse her disregard for the suffering of others. The sequence involving her husband's slap and Rītā's subsequent ingestion of poison brings domestic violence, a self-destructive impulse, and the fear of losing respectability together. Reducing this crisis either to the "punishment of a wicked wife" or to "the persecution of an innocent husband" would be a false simplification in both directions.

12. Raśmiyā: Invisible Labour and a Girl's Powerlessness to Resist

Raśmiyā, aged ten or twelve, cleans, brings food and water, and performs domestic service. Her father and the conditions of her employment are connected with a network of household service on the paternal side. When a vessel of water falls from her hands and Rītā grabs her hair and slaps her, the play makes class cruelty directly visible onstage. Raśmiyā's small rejoinder—that she did not drop the vessel deliberately—is a minimal assertion of her humanity, which Rītā's oppressive response attempts to silence.

Raśmiyā's suffering is not an ordinary domestic quarrel. It expresses violence inflicted on the body of a labouring girl to maintain the comfort of a privileged household. Ghūṭar promises her twice the wages and better facilities in another affluent home; even this proposal substitutes a change of employer for independent protection. From one perspective, Raśmiyā's vulnerability turns Ghūṭar's apparent "kindness" into the possibility of renewed exploitation. The play does not fully develop a language of rights for such domestic workers; nevertheless, its depiction of her suffering confronts readers and spectators with an uncomfortable question.

13. Genā: The Ethics of Service Rather than the Price of Kinship

Genā is the son of the impoverished Phūknā, but his academic ability and good character receive recognition in the village. The Master wants to send him for

higher education; Genā does not wish to leave his teacher. Narendra's success rested upon the Master's long sacrifice, while Genā also represents a fresh educational possibility. This child offers an unspoken answer concerning the obligations of a new generation. After the Master's illness and humiliation, Genā looks after him, gives him water, begs him to return to the village, and finally offers his shoulder as support.

The final scene shows more than an individual leaving home. The teacher who devoted his life to the success of the educated and high-ranking Narendra finds, at the moment he needs protection, the shoulder of an impoverished pupil. The scene places human commitment above economic or administrative position. Yet Genā should not be reduced to a sentimental symbol of the "ideal poor": he insists on giving up future educational opportunities, and the cost of that insistence also deserves consideration. The tension between moral fidelity and self-development gives his character life.

14. The Social Performance of "Status"

The characters not only possess wealth; they also perform it. Arriving by car, letters of introduction, briefcases, grand English expressions, official titles, refrigerators, sumptuous meals, wedding expenditure, and bank passbooks: all these stage properties announce the standing of their owners. A household whose essential capital consisted of relationships and learning changes its own standards while aspiring to align itself with another household's material abundance.

The outward currency called "status" theoretically signifies social esteem; the play measures its inner cost. The Master does not regard poverty as disgraceful, but insists on choosing a marriage appropriate to formal prestige. Divākar performs respect for education, but makes that respect an instrument of marital consent. Rītā equates the objects of an elevated lifestyle with dignity while destroying the dignity of relationships. Ghūṭar profits from these masks by changing his position from place to place. Thus the world of official standing becomes a kind of extended social performance.

15. The Journey of Money: Letters, Gifts, Passbooks, and Chequebooks

The play's objects are not static decorations but active agents of narrative. The first letter carries the marriage proposal; banknotes expose Ghūṭar's self-interest; the fifty-thousand-rupee sum becomes both the mask of donation and a vehicle of rumour; after the marriage, the passbook becomes the site of a clash between the generosity of the elder brother and sister-in-law and Rītā's sense of entitlement. The elder brother meets the wedding expenses from his provident fund, yet attempts to hand over to Narendra the entire sum accumulated in the wedding account. Narendra is unwilling to accept it, while Rītā takes possession of the passbook.

Letters follow the reverse course. Those sent from the village arrive in the city, only to be torn up in Rītā's hands. The record of money is preserved, while the news of suffering is destroyed. This second action sharpens the play's moral equation: financial accounts survive, while the account of human relationships is lost. The playwright's effective technique is to transform objects into evidence of intention. The passbook and the torn letter disclose an entire social division without lengthy exposition.

16. From Village to City: Displacement of Values within the Division of Scenes

The stage directions make clear that the first six scenes concern the village and that the later scenes take place inside the urban home. The first part permits use of the whole stage; lighting in the foreground is proposed for the pond ghat. In the second, the drawing room and the servant's quarters become distinct acting areas. The division is not merely a technical convenience: at the beginning the Master occupies the centre of his modest home; in the final part he is pushed into the most neglected space of a similar household.

The village scenes feature thatched roofs, mats, the pond, and the exchange of letters; the city has telephones, sofas, new clothes, talk of refrigerators, the husband's absence on official visits, and service by a maid. The play does not declare every urban object immoral. The problem begins when standards of convenience become standards for judging people. Here the conjunction of fear of illness and urban class boundaries moves the elderly teacher out of the household and into the servant's room. Onstage this displacement is humiliation in its most visible form.

17. Illness, Fear, and the Inhuman Logic of Prestige

The Master's illness is first understood as possibly tuberculosis; other characters also raise the fear of cancer. The dramatic text provides no decisive medical diagnosis, and it would therefore be inappropriate to name a definite disease. From the narrative standpoint the significant matter is not the illness's name but the treatment of the patient. Rītā fears infection; Ghūṭar amplifies that fear and advises the use of separate eating and drinking vessels. Discussion of illness consequently ceases to be a question of care and becomes an instrument of exclusion.

The theatrical presence of the sick body—its pain, coughing, fatigue, and need for support—reminds spectators of human mortality. Moving this body to a servant's quarters visualises the collision between the splendour of modern life and its absence of compassion. Chandrakānt and Genā offer support; Ghūṭar gives no assistance of his own accord; Rītā seeks means of keeping her distance; Narendra arrives late. The patient's body becomes a moral test for every character.

18. Language: Popular Speech, Official Vocabulary, and the Rhythm of Satire

The dialogue of *Lauṅgiyā Mirchāi* is an important instrument of its social effect. Ghūṭar's reiterated "Durgā, Durgā," his idiosyncratic pronunciations of English official terms, his unexpected changes of subject, and his ungainly self-assurance generate humour. Phūknā's idioms of popular address, Genā's simple questions, the Master's measured language of duty, Chandrakānt's reasoned assaults, and Rītā's vocabulary of urban wants establish distinct verbal personalities.

English words are not merely signs of education; they map position, class, and consumption. "Income-tax officer," "status," "modern," "dining table," "tour," "fridge," and "servant quarters" are linguistic signs of shifting values. Code-switching makes the characters' social proximity and distance discernible. Onstage the effect becomes more concentrated when pronunciation is treated not just as a matter for ridicule but as a performance of class and a contest over meaning.

The dramatist creates dialogue in which ordinary village characters can apprehend social truths that the highly educated ignore. Nevertheless, parts of the humour also invite audiences to laugh at uneducated or rural pronunciation. A contemporary production can keep this difference visible while preserving the humanity and dignity of the speakers.

19. From Humour to Pathos: The Gradual Reversal of Emotional Form

The play begins in the current of *hāsya rasa*: the misunderstanding of a name, Ghūṭar's recitation to Durgā, Phūknā's jibes, familial banter, the greed for food, and the incongruent meanings attached to objects and office. Yet social cruelty is never absent beneath this amusement. What audiences initially laugh away later returns as a poignant crisis. Ghūṭar's verbal game of "welcome and hospitality" becomes a cost exacted by life's struggles; the Master's casual insistence on "status" turns into the compulsion to return to his village.

The work does not end with the conventional scene of death in tragedy. The Master lives, but the spiritual home of his relationships has collapsed. Narendra is remorseful, but trust has already been damaged. Rītā survives the ingestion of poison, but no easy scene of restored marital confidence follows. This pathetic conclusion exposes a crisis of social life that remains unfinished. The dramatic construction is effective precisely because it refuses to contain suffering within a simple formula for distributing punishments.

20. Multiple Forms of Violence: Bodily, Verbal, and Institutional

Violence in the play is not confined to the moment of a slap or the ingestion of poison. Disparaging an impoverished pupil's father as a menial labourer, placing a sick man in a servant's room, beating a child domestic worker, withholding

information, and spreading rumours to exert pressure over marriage are all differing forms of violence. Because many are enacted as respectable, "normal" conduct, their social critique becomes particularly important.

Narendra's slap of Rītā is a decisive scene. It gives his moral anger a violent form, but violence cannot legitimise the wrongs she has committed. Rītā survives her self-destructive act, and Chandrakānt also condemns physical assault in quarrels between husband and wife. At this point the play reveals another vicious circle of domestic violence. Criticism must insist that readers do not justify one form of wrongdoing by treating it as retaliation for another.

21. Two Images of Women and the Limits of the Patriarchal Framework

The contrast between the Master's wife and Rītā sharpens the play's moral structure. The first woman is an embodiment of sacrifice, propriety, rural labour, and maternity; the second becomes a symbol of education, modern aspiration, intolerance, and consumption. The opposition makes the narrative clear but somewhat diminishes the complexity of women's experience. The Master's wife herself has no decisive power in the marital arrangement: her proposal to seek a bride from a poor household is rejected by her husband. Rītā is given space to voice her desires, but the construction of her character presents her chiefly as an antagonist.

Between these images Raśmiyā introduces a third possibility: neither the ideal mistress of the home nor the modern lover of luxury, but a labouring girl subjected to violence. Reading the play from her position breaks down the simple oppositions between "educated" and "uneducated," "tradition" and "modernity." Who decides the household's honour? Who pays for comfort? Which woman's voice can be heard? In this sense Raśmiyā's limited speech opens a considerable critical possibility.

22. Dramatic Time, Information, and the Audience's Prior Knowledge

The audience learns the real plan in Ghūṭar and Divākar's secret meeting, while the Master remains unaware of it. Rītā's tearing up of letters is likewise witnessed by spectators, although Narendra remains ignorant for a long time. This arrangement of the audience's prior knowledge creates dramatic irony. Readers and spectators can see the crisis approaching, but the characters cannot escape it because of their own misconceptions.

The premarital waiting, post-wedding celebrations in the village, Narendra's departure, the intervening lapse of time, the Master's illness, the concealed suppression of letters in the city, and the final confrontation form a chain of causes and consequences. One attraction of the scene arrangement is that many major events are not shown directly but disclosed through letters, speech,

offstage reports, and characters' arrivals. This method reduces staging costs and activates the spectator's imagination. Certain lengthy explanatory exchanges, however, may slow the narrative's pace; forceful direction can sustain rhythm in those passages through underlying tension.

23. Stage Properties and Theatrical Practice: From Conventional Staging to Possible Production

The play's stage directions are detailed but do not require extravagantly lavish décor. Initially there is a hut of straw and bamboo, a mat, cot, and old chair; subsequently a sofa, telephone, table, and minimal arrangement for the servant's room make the stage legible. Lighting can differentiate the village ghat, household *dalān*, urban drawing room, and rear chamber. Tearing letters, counting notes, handing over a bank passbook, slapping a girl, carrying an ailing person, and the final support offered by a shoulder are effective dramatic actions, not merely spoken dialogue.

Two ethical cautions are appropriate in contemporary performance. First, violence against Raśmiyā and the marital slap should not be played for laughter. Second, the Master's illness should not be staged as the dramatic certainty of a particular disease unless the text supplies such a conclusion. Lighting that represents village and city not as simple signs of "good" and "evil" but as two interlinked spaces of the same society can preserve the text's richer meanings.

24. Distinctiveness in Relation to Other Plays

In Lallan Prasad Thakur's early *Baṛkā Sāheb*, the prominent issue is distance from village and culture following the attainment of office; in *Mister Nīlo Kākā*, public politics, folk humour, and the ironies of leadership emerge. *Lauṅgiyā Mirchāi* brings both concerns into the heart of the household: official rank becomes a value governing social conduct, while Ghūṭar's popular mediation, a source of comedy, turns into the agent of domestic destruction. This comparative observation indicates thematic connections among the works, not their mechanical repetition. Published excerpts from Gajendra Thakur's survey of modern Maithili drama likewise identify the play as a work revealing the relationship between money and modernity.

Another distinction is the dramatist's choice of a teacher who undoubtedly wishes to be good, rather than a "bad" official, as the centre of criticism. The choice makes social evil appear not merely as individual greed but as the unthinking acceptance of prestige. A character who agrees with his professed values and yet violates them in practice is more convincing.

25. Critical Reassessment: Achievements and Limitations

The first accomplishment of *Lauṅgiyā Mirchāi* is its portrayal of the intimate relationship between social economy and private feeling. An anti-dowry slogan is insufficient in itself: alliances with prominent households, government office,

economic pressure exerted in the name of courtesy, and aspirations towards consumption also constitute a dowry culture. A second achievement is the naturalness of the dialogue and its performable satire. Exchanges between Ghūṭar and Phūknā, Rītā's household, Genā's questions, and Chandrakānt's objections produce theatrical chemistry. A third achievement is the final scene, in which a poor boy's shoulder rather than any speech becomes the principal symbol.

The limitations must be viewed alongside these accomplishments. Chandrakānt's explanatory dialogue at times makes the argument more explicit than the dramatic impulse requires. Because most of Rītā's characterisation is concentrated in negative conduct, the inner dilemmas of an educated woman are not fully developed. The news of illness, episodes of injustice, and the dramatic shock of poison ingestion accumulate rapidly; without skilled production they risk emotional excess. Viewers who recognise the potential of Phūknā and Raśmiyā may wish that their voices had been developed further. These objections do not, however, invalidate the work's central social insight; rather, they clarify the critical field of its present relevance.

26. Conclusion: From Benefaction to Humiliation and the Rediscovery of Human Support

Modernity itself is not the culprit in *Lauṅgiyā Mirchāi*; the crisis lies in the tendency to place prestige, office, money, and consumption in the place of humanity under the name of modernity. The Master raises Narendra through his labour but assigns undue importance to social position in choosing a marriage. Divākar uses a narrative of philanthropy to secure a relationship while generating covert pressure. Ghūṭar pursues private advantage beneath the invocation of a goddess. Narendra is grateful but acts too late; Rītā equates the deficiencies of a simple home with a deficiency of consumer goods; society confines the sick teacher to a servant's room.

The final scene asks a difficult question: how can a household preserve its dignity when the person for whose advancement it has surrendered all its pleasures becomes "great"? The Master instructs Narendra to maintain propriety towards his father-in-law and departs, leaning on Genā's shoulder. Humiliation, helplessness, affection, and self-respect coexist in his decision. The home does not visibly collapse, but its moral centre falls away. Here the title's bitterness acquires its full meaning: when a society forgets moral discernment in its appetite for money, the sweetness of relationships is the first thing to perish. The lasting literary value of this extended tragic satire resides in its test of human relationships, perennial in significance yet socially particular in form.

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3. Baklel

Baklel: Education, Labour, and Tragic Satire Tested by Social Intelligence

An Extended Literary and Theatrical Critique of Lallan Prasad Thakur's Play

Abstract

Lallan Prasad Thakur's *Baklel* is a notable work of Maithili theatre that moves from humour to pathos and from pathos towards social discernment. Centring upon differences in the educational achievements, economic struggles, and moral conduct of three sons of the same family, the play asks what should form the actual basis for evaluating a person: examination marks, high office, and property, or responsibility towards one's own people and the capacity for sympathy? Guṇānand, humiliated since childhood as "Baklel," labours to care for his father; his highly educated elder brothers, meanwhile, withdraw from familial relationships behind the shelter of social prestige. The playwright makes this moral reversal visible through humour, domestic dialogue, letters, songs, stage objects, and leaps in dramatic time. Through close textual study, this critique considers the politics of naming, labour and class, education and morality, dowry, the positioning of women, the symbolism of objects, linguistic differentiation, and theatrical organisation. It also subjects to critical examination the one-sided picture of a workers' strike, the tendency to confine women's labour to idealised service, and the excessively pathetic conclusion. The work's enduring value, it argues, resides not simply in praising sacrifice but in changing the criteria by which social intelligence and human relationships are judged.

Keywords

Maithili drama; Lallan Prasad Thakur; *Baklel*; social stigma; education; labour; familial responsibility; dowry; tragic satire; stagecraft.

1. Introduction: Inverted Standards of Moral Evaluation

A society's judgment of whom to call "intelligent" and whom to call "foolish" is shaped not only by an individual's gifts but also by the society's own prejudices. *Baklel* transforms such prejudice into dramatic crisis. A child who does not conform to ordinary examination questions is given a name by his family, neighbours, and closest associates. At first the name generates humour, then becomes a social identity, and finally has its meaning reversed by the play. What is staged as his supposed deficiency ultimately becomes the ethical capacity through which his humanity is demonstrated.

The play's central opposition is not the crude proposition that the uneducated are good and the educated bad. Gannū's two elder brothers are gifted; their intellectual ability is genuine. Gannū's difficulties with schooling are likewise real within the fictional world. The crisis emerges when acquired knowledge becomes detached from human obligation and the prestige of learning supplies a justification for disparaging another person. At this point the play is not opposed to education: it tests the social purpose of education.

2. The Text in the Context of Theatre History

The published acting text of *Baklel* brings together the actor's body, stage properties, and performance history. The cast list assigns separate actors to the characters' childhood and adult incarnations; the stage directions envision changing social conditions shown within a common setting. The work is consequently not merely a sequence of dialogue to be read, but social action capable of enactment on stage.

According to the available performance history, the first production took place in Jamshedpur and the second in New Delhi. The dramatist himself played Dayā Bābū. This detail has critical significance: the generous protector and the later figure whose desire for justice approaches anger were both embodied by the playwright in his performance. Kusum Thakur's memoir mentions well-known productions and awards received by the play. The year of its independent book publication is also recorded in a catalogue of plays. These sources trace the history of the play's social circulation; awards are not sufficient proof of literary excellence, though they do constitute historical indications of theatrical reception.

3. The Meaning of the Title: From Abuse to an Ethical Question

In everyday usage, "baklel" comes to suggest intellectual incapacity or inept conduct. Gannū's birth name is Guṇānand, but the nickname gradually displaces it. At the beginning he himself asks to be called *budhiyār*, intelligent. This insistence expresses not merely childish pride but an ordinary demand for social respect. Those closest to him burst into laughter at his supposedly ridiculous utterances, without considering that the repeated application of a name can restrict another person's sense of self-worth.

The situation may be considered in the light of Erving Goffman's analysis of stigmatised identity: society first selects a trait and then reduces a person to that single mark. It would, however, be unsupported by the text to assign Gannū a particular clinical condition. The play depicts social labelling, not a medical case. At the end Dayā Bābū changes the question: the real *baklel* is the person who fails to understand social responsibility. This alteration of meaning contains the play's most serious satire.

4. The Dramatic Intelligence of the Childhood Scene: The Question of "Two and Two"

The first scene begins with a simple lesson at home. Saddū studies arithmetic, Jaddū science, and Gannū is occupied by his own question. Gannū asks why two and two make four rather than five. The question certainly offers an occasion for laughter, but also contains an unconscious philosophical hint about social agreement and the naming of numbers. Gannū cannot express this possibility in his own terms; everyone else sees a breach of discipline rather than the possibility of thought. Jaddū teaches "two plus two equals four" through physical punishment. The scene subtly shifts from the logic of knowledge to the logic of violence.

Gannū's literal apprehension of ordinary expressions—when his father says he is "rotting" and Gannū responds by smelling his body, or when he takes "a little water" to mean the smallest possible amount—opens unexpected directions in logic. Linguistic divergence produces the comedy, but spectators can also recognise how a single vocabulary accommodates different expectations. Gannū's problem is not merely that he cannot supply correct answers; he also fails to behave in accordance with socially preferred meanings.

5. The Father Murārī: Deprivation, Aspiration, and Self-Respect

Murārī is a clerk. A prolonged strike at the factory has stopped his regular income. His limited resources stand exposed before every necessity: the children's textbooks, food, and the household rent. Nonetheless, he regards education as a means of social advancement. The marks obtained by Saddū and Jaddū might have filled his heart with pride, but at that very moment the precarious health of his wife and the family's empty stomachs transform the meaning of success. Celebration and calamity inhabit the same house in this dramatic conjunction.

Murārī's tragedy is that he sees his children as the security of his future; he believes that higher education alone will put an end to the household's suffering. The play subsequently reveals the weakness of this faith. His aspirations were not improper: a poor father may reasonably wish for his sons to have respectable lives. The problem is rather that the benefits of achievements secured through the family's common resources do not flow back to the family. The success the father desired materialises economically but fails emotionally.

6. The Representation of the Strike: The Force of Realism and Its Limits of Vision

Murārī's wife regards the strike as a game played by leaders whose own stomachs are full. Murārī's indignation is sharper: the factory gates are closed, workers who wish to work are afraid, and the household hearth remains cold. The play presents the immediate deprivation of a working family with considerable

intensity. The economic time of a strike—days, weeks, months—becomes a crisis of food, made palpable in the couple's dialogue.

Yet the limits of this section are also clear to critical scrutiny. The causes of the strike, workers' demands, the employer's conduct, wage exploitation, and internal disagreements within the union receive no comparable attention. The strike consequently appears as an almost univocally harmful force. This may be convincing as the experience of Murārī's family, but it is not an exhaustive account of the workers' movement. The dramatic perspective is selective in its treatment of class conflict. Acknowledging that selection is essential to literary judgment; ignoring it would reduce the pathetic narrative to an easy moral sermon.

7. The Grammar of Hunger in Objects: Bread, Broken Grain, and Fallen Food

Food in *Baklel* is not merely background; it is the material language of social relations. A mother sorting fragments of grain, a hungry child, water in a small glass, and the inability to give someone anything to eat transform abstract "poverty" into palpable matter. The world of objects surrounding the characters conveys as much as they themselves say.

The end of the fourth scene is intensely moving. Dayā Bābū sends for food for the sick woman, but when Golījī returns carrying bread and vegetables, the cry of death has already arisen inside the house. The food drops from his hands; the light is concentrated upon it. The fallen bread becomes tangible testimony to an attempt at rescue that failed, assistance that came too late, and the deprivation of a worker's family. In this realistic use of an object, pathos cuts more deeply than an artificial declaration could.

8. Dayā Bābū: Patronage, Guilt, and Self-Examination

Dayā Bābū is a prosperous, elderly, solitary man. His son has settled abroad. Initially he gives Gannū chocolates and shows affection towards the tenant family, but he also confesses the bribery and dishonesty of his former official career. The confession prevents his becoming a one-dimensional benefactor. He is passing through a sense of guilt over social wrongdoing and finds in service to Murārī's family an occasion for atonement.

The character's intellectual conflict must not be overlooked. Someone who formerly misused the system to acquire office and property later employs his wealth and influence to do good. The play suggests that the ethical meaning of property may change with its use. The question nevertheless remains: can private generosity provide a lasting remedy for social injustice? Dayā's philanthropy supplies immediate help to Murārī's family, but does not overcome the structural deprivation of the working world. Both the play's humanistic strength and its social limitations dwell in this difference.

9. A Leap in Time and the Maturation of Tragedy

There is an interval of approximately fifteen years after the first half of the play. Saddū progresses towards becoming a doctor, Jaddū an engineer, while Gannū grows from an unsuccessful schoolboy into a young man who depends upon bodily strength. The appearance of the same stage changes: the curtain is worn, the cot broken, and household objects dilapidated. The passage of time is created not by lengthy explanation but through altered bodies, costumes, and the material environment.

This temporal interval sharpens the question of judgment. Spectators who earlier laughed at Gannū's failure in school examinations now watch to discover who has the greater strength in the examinations of practical life. The jump between times on stage is not merely a device for accelerating the plot; it becomes a way of changing the very criterion of moral evaluation.

10. Ghaṭakrāj and Ḍhepālāl: Dowry, Debt, and the Operations of the Market

Ghaṭakrāj and Ḍhepālāl in the sixth scene embody harsh economic forces concealed beneath the play's comic costume. Ghaṭakrāj interprets a marriage bargain through examination marks, prestige, and a well-qualified groom. Ḍhepālāl tries to acquire Murārī's ancestral homestead by exerting the pressure of interest-bearing debt. Their idioms differ, but their logic of money is the same: converting human circumstances into prices and transactions.

Murārī speaks of an ideal marriage; the matchmaker explains its "benefits" through an offer of a lakh of rupees and modern consumer goods. Meanwhile, the creditor ridicules Murārī's small plot of land and his claims to respectability. The contrast between the wealthy family's generous proposal and the impoverished household's fear of losing its homestead reveals dowry as a mechanism for reproducing social inequality. The seductive prospect of ending the poor family's troubles through money becomes a test of moral choice.

11. The Presence of Absent Sons through a Letter

Jaddū's letter is an important dramatic device. Though the educated son remains absent from the stage, his language, interests, and conditions decisively influence his father. Acceptance of the marriage has already occurred; the father is expected not to command but merely to acquiesce. The letter enumerates the prestige of the prominent teacher's family and the benefits of dowry. It also demands that Gannū not be invited to the celebration, because his presence might compromise "respectability."

Economic calculation and social shame converge in this letter. A brother raised amid the family's deprivation attempts, as soon as he acquires prosperity, to exclude his younger brother from the circle of kinship. Jaddū's letter also brings news of Saddū's marriage abroad. The two elder brothers, physically absent from

the stage, suddenly become present in the language of self-interest. Murārī's health deteriorates after the letter is read, establishing an immediate theatrical relation of cause and effect; yet the rapid association of mental and physical crisis also heightens dramatic emotion.

12. Gannū's Turning Point: From Guardian of Property to Supporter of His Father

At first Gannū imagines that he will guard the property his elder brothers acquire. His life has been so thoroughly circumscribed that he seeks a role only at the edge of their achievements. After the letter is read, he understands that there is no honourable place for him within that circle. Choosing the path of labour then becomes a fundamental transformation of character.

Gannū declares that if necessary he will undertake manual labour, but will not leave his father dependent on the elder brothers. This is the play's moral centre. A young man denied academic skill, school success, and social esteem seeks the capacity to work. His decision is not compassion alone but a demand for self-respect. For the first time Dayā Bābū too replaces the outward nickname "Baklel" with the criterion of social responsibility. What had earlier diminished Gannū now becomes a question directed at the judgment of the other characters.

Gannū and his father: labour as a bond of responsibility

13. The Dignity of Labour and Its Bodily Cost

Gannū becomes a construction labourer. This is not uncomplicated heroism: it is an arduous everyday life of low wages, high living costs, dust, burdens, and physical deterioration. Saving part of his earnings for his father is central to the meaning of his conduct. The play distinguishes "earning" from "providing care": the two elder brothers also earn money, but Gannū converts his income into responsibility towards familial relations.

An uncomfortable question arises here: must an uneducated labourer work himself to death to establish his virtue? The play's emotional structure glorifies Gannū's sacrifice; from the standpoint of social justice, however, that sacrifice is also the tragic consequence of exploitation. Even if his body had not been destroyed, he would have deserved the same respect from his father and wife. This possibility opens a critical meaning broader than the play's explicitly stated moral instruction.

14. Marriage: The Condition of Care and a Woman's Moral Consent

In discussing marriage, Gannū says he seeks a woman who will regard not only her husband but also his disabled father as her own father. Dayā Bābū is stunned by this condition. On one hand it is an expectation of familial companionship

exceeding narrow conventions of domestic life; on the other, it risks making a woman's labour and continuous service mandatory conditions of marriage.

Gannū's wife is seen serving Murārī immediately upon her entrance. She wipes the body of the father-in-law whom she regards as a father, massages his feet, and attends to his meals. She expresses satisfaction in serving him by her own choice. That consent deserves respect; at the same time it is necessary to ask how much language is given to the newly married woman's other aspirations—education, economic independence, freedom of choice, and social life. The play develops her as a compassionate ideal while allowing comparatively less space for the complexity of an autonomous person.

15. Unnamed Women Characters: Presence and Invisibility

The two principal women—Murārī's wife and Gannū's wife—appear in the work chiefly as "woman" or through terms of relationship. Their absence of personal names is not an insignificant detail. Without them the narrative would be impossible: the first woman's hunger and death constitute the pathetic climax of the first half, while the second woman's care and courage become the moral centre of the last. Nevertheless, the public world of the story is populated by named men with professions and offices; the women's identities remain designated by kinship.

Gannū's wife protests against the elder brothers before Dayā and rejects the attribution of "Baklel" to her husband. This independent voice matters. Yet at the end Dayā Bābū's calling her his daughter and promising her a new life determines her future within the benevolent intervention of a male protector. There is compassion in that resolution, but not a complete development of her independent decision-making. A gendered reading of the play must acknowledge both meanings.

16. Hospitality and Millet Bread: A Second Meaning of Food

Viśvanāth, the visitor in the eighth scene, arrives from a world differentiated by both economics and language. His clothing, use of Hindi, official background, and Murārī's impoverished household confront each other on the same stage as contrasting dispositions. There is little to feed him in the house, but great embarrassment at letting a guest leave without food. *Maḍuā* (finger millet) bread, salt, oil, and onion give the scene the specificity of a local food culture.

In the first half, bread symbolised what could not be obtained; here the poor family's bread becomes an object of respect and cultural recognition. Food unusual to a foreign or metropolitan gaze is the basis of survival within the home. Viśvanāth exhibits both curiosity and unfamiliarity. The author does not turn him into a wholly wicked visitor: he observes Murārī's condition and reacts to Saddū's neglect of duty. This figure reveals different levels of bodily poverty and social dignity.

17. Dramatic Language: Maithili Domestic Intimacy, Hindi Authority, and English Prestige

The domestic scenes speak a living Maithili. Gannū's simple, direct, often unusual interpretation of words, Golījī's recurring "āhirebā," Ghaṭakrāj's repeated "quite right," and Ḍhepālāl's brusque speech establish distinctive social colours. Dialogue does more than communicate events; it makes people recognisable as soon as they speak. Different rhythms of utterance generate local humour.

Hindi becomes prominent with Viśvanāth's arrival; English expressions and the attraction of life abroad are more common in the elder brothers' social world. This shift does not automatically pronounce any language morally superior or inferior, but it certainly signals the social organisation of prestige. In particular, the opportunistic conduct of the highly educated sons and their English-inflected language of respectability appear in the same sequence of scenes. Through this linguistic contact the author creates not merely a stark village–city or homeland–abroad opposition, but the irony of a modernity severed from its original relationships.

18. The Architecture of the Stage: Stairs, Doors, and Social Hierarchy

The dramatic text envisages a simple stage. An outside door, an inner door, the staircase leading to Dayā Bābū's upper residence, and Murārī's lower floor reveal class difference without elaborate construction. The prosperous patron lives above and the poor family below. Moral evaluation, however, does not follow the fixed heights of social position. The dramatist makes visual use of that contradiction.

After the interval, the damaged curtain and broken cot signify not only the passage of time but the collapse of the family's foundations. The inventory of properties is modest, yet their deployment is active: a letter makes an absent voice present; a money order becomes rejected compensation for relationships; a gun is the excessive expression of anger; bread is an unsuccessful remedy for hunger; and three thousand rupees bear witness to Gannū's final remaining strength. The density of meaning assigned to these objects within a limited space is theatrically noteworthy. In comparison with Peter Brook's ideas about the empty space, these directions show that monumental architecture is not essential for rich dramatic meaning.

19. The Return of Song: From Comic Refrain to Lament

The play begins with a song built on the word "Baklel." Initially the song produces amusement; after the family's disintegration, its repetition assumes the tone of mourning. By repeating a single word, the dramatist makes the audience question its earlier laughter in the closing scenes. Spectators who laughed at the

name must, on seeing it associated with death, reconsider the social implications of their amusement.

Song interrupts the action to offer social commentary. The bird leaving its nest at the mother's death, a diamond amid coal at Gannū's death, and the closing question about the wise person and the *baklel* form a sequence of symbols tracing an intellectual journey. Yet the repeated, overtly pathetic refrain also presses too insistently upon the audience's independent formation of feeling. The play is most subtle when objects and silence themselves disclose meaning; song often makes that meaning explicit. Within this tension one may discern the connection between its orientation towards popular audiences and the limitations of its stagecraft.

20. Two Deaths and the Problem of Moral Causality

The deaths of Murārī's wife and Gannū occur within a web of social deprivation and the failure of care. The first destroys the family's sense of security; the second brings the play's moral reckoning to its final height. Worn down by coughing blood, Gannū has nevertheless continued to labour; he returns with money for his father's last rites and collapses there. The narrative turns his body into its final evidence of tragic resistance.

This powerful scene also requires restrained criticism. The text describes a bloody cough and bodily debilitation but does not provide a definite medical diagnosis; speculative naming of the illness would be inappropriate to scholarship. Furthermore, the deaths of father and son within a very short interval intensify emotional force but also introduce pressure from dramatic coincidence rather than fully realised causality. The result is compassion, yet the question remains whether Gannū's life would not have been equally meaningful without his death.

21. The Śrāddha and the Irony of Public Prestige

The elder brothers' return after the tenth scene is no simple narrative of remorse. They propose a grand *śrāddha* ceremony for their deceased father, calculating expenditure, guests, and prestige. Dayā Bābū asks why sons who ignored a man's suffering while he lived should be so eager to display social respect after his death. Here the play's satire becomes incisive: after neglecting living relationships, the wish to exhibit generosity in the dead man's name turns into a commerce of public approval.

Murārī's final letter becomes testimony against this display. The letter is an emotional testament, yet Dayā's execution of its wishes also presents a complex ethical problem: the dead man's desire, the living sons' remorse, and Gannū's final labour conflict with one another. Ultimately the elder brothers' insistence becomes a matter of supposed entitlement and property; they dismiss Dayā's years of help as insignificant. Here the play shows with particular force how the word "family" can be invoked to escape responsibility.

22. The Limits of Anger: Dayā's Gun and Moral Resolution

Dayā Bābū's anger in the final scene is dramatically intense. A character who has moved from earlier corruption towards atonement feels compelled to take up a gun when confronted with injustice to the family under his protection. In one sense, the action protects Gannū's widow and resists the elder brothers' cruelty; in another, it does not constitute an impartial ethical remedy. The gun is the ultimate language of authority, fear, and violence. Readers should perceive this explosive transformation not simply as heroism but as the ironic tension between emotional excess and the desire for justice.

Dayā's acceptance of the widow as a daughter imagines human kinship beyond the biological boundaries of family. Yet the play does not disclose the future form of the promised "new life." It is impossible to determine whether it means remarriage, independence, or a home under protective guardianship. The play ends at this point of open possibility. Readers may experience its ending as reassurance and incompleteness together.

23. The Structure of Tragic Comedy: The Power of Performance and Over-Direction

The opening laughter of *Baklel* creates the ethical ground for the subsequent tragedy. Spectators who laugh at Gannū's ineptitude ultimately behold him as the protagonist. This reversal opens a possibility of social self-criticism within accessible entertainment. Domestic quarrelling, Ghaṭakrāj's repetitions, Golījī's banter, and Ḍhepālāl's ostentation lend the theatrical arrangement an orientation towards popular audiences.

The dramatist, however, repeatedly makes the characters articulate the conclusion explicitly. Audiences can infer the question "who should be called a baklel?" from many episodes, yet in the closing scenes the characters explain it again and again. This tendency increases the clarity of the play's argument but, by insisting upon an unambiguous moral judgment, somewhat narrows the space for complex characterisation. The elder brothers become entirely self-interested and Gannū entirely self-sacrificing. Such polarisation increases the work's effectiveness in popular theatre while reducing its psychological variety.

24. The Work's Distinctive Accomplishments and Contradictions

Its first achievement is to transform folk humour into an ethical question. The second is to turn the familiar problems linking education, family, and labour into tangible stage objects and actions. The third is to convey changes in time and class through objects, stairs, and lighting within an ordinary stage space. The fourth is to make the unnamed woman's domestic labour and Gannū's wage work more decisive than the grandeur of official prestige. The fifth is to sustain the contradiction within a single name through repeated songs and exchanges of dialogue.

These accomplishments coexist with limitations. The representation of the workers' movement lacks critical comprehensiveness; the women's opportunities for self-determination are often confined by the ethical expectation of devoted service; and the concentration of pathos in the final incidents risks replacing social complexity with a simple division of virtuous and unvirtuous persons. Recognising these limits does not diminish the work's importance; it makes its creative procedures more intelligible.

25. Conclusion: Who Is the Baklel, and Who Is Wise?

The play's final question compels readers and spectators to reconsider the politics of naming in their own society. Examinations, degrees, and professions are useful achievements, but they provide no automatic certificate of human responsibility. Equally, failure at school is not a final verdict of inferiority upon someone's social worth. *Baklel* tests both beliefs through a family tragedy and the life of a young labourer.

The meaning of Gannū's sacrifice is not his death but the responsibility towards his father that he lived. The significance of Dayā's reform is not his gun but his movement, through guilt, into an ethical reconstruction of relationships. Even while situating Gannū's wife within an ideal of service, the play uses her to open the possibility of kinship beyond the family's blood ties. Because of these tensions, *Baklel* rises above an ordinary didactic play to become a powerful theatrical work about social valuation. Its real achievement for a critic is that, at the end, the meaning of "intelligence" is determined not by credentials but by sympathy, labour, justice, and responsibility.

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PART I · MAITHILI DRAMA / LITERARY CRITICISM 4

4. Ādi Vā Ant

The Price of Honesty and the Ironies of the Marriage Market: Dowry, Caste, Women's Autonomy, and Self-Reflective Theatrical Consciousness in Lallan Prasad Thakur's *Ādi Vā Ant*

An Extended Text-Based Literary and Theatrical Critique of a Maithili Play

Abstract

Lallan Prasad Thakur's *Ādi Vā Ant* reveals the conflict between the social system of dowry and personal honesty through the experience of a middle-class family. Karuṇeś is an industrious, principled engineer; his daughter Ḍaulī is a highly educated young woman who aspires to self-determination. Yet the demands of the marriage market, concern for family prestige, the intermediary's self-interest, opportunistic professions of idealism, and the fear of social exclusion jointly create circumstances in which even the honest father comes to the brink of signing the corrupt contractor's papers. Ḍaulī's intervention brings an immediate resolution to the domestic events, but the final exchange between dramatist, characters, and spectators questions the sufficiency of an individual solution. This study closely examines narrative structure, the economic logic of dowry, women's consent, caste prohibitions, the institutional foundations of corruption, the social action of humour, linguistic plurality, stage properties, the two-tiered ending, and the work's contradictions. Its principal contention is that the play's most enduring achievement lies not in an anti-dowry declaration but in showing how a social abuse can render individual virtue helpless in isolation. Nevertheless, the final scenes' inclination to assess women's independent lives through a marriage-centred language of moral fear, together with their excessively direct didacticism, constitutes a limitation.

Keywords

Maithili drama; Lallan Prasad Thakur; *Ādi Vā Ant*; dowry; marriage market; honesty; corruption; women's autonomy; caste; folk humour; theatrical consciousness.

1. Introduction: The Private Resolve of Virtue and the Public Structure of Society

The fundamental question in *Ādi Vā Ant* is not whether an individual's honesty is good or corruption bad. The moral answer to that question is evident from the outset. The work's distinctiveness begins when the playwright creates circumstances in which a person who knows the right path finds it increasingly difficult to remain upon it. Karuṇeś's lifelong reputation, his daughter's future, his wife's anxieties, and the interdependent relationships of society cease to be separate matters and begin to exert pressure upon one another. Through this process the play transforms virtue from a merely personal disposition into a question of social organisation.

Dowry here is not an isolated, distorted custom but a comprehensive system of transactions among prestige, caste, government office, business, contracting, teaching, domestic affection, and public shame. Its force does not fall upon the father alone: the daughter begins to question the meaning of her education, the conditions of her marriage, and her position in society. The complexity of these relationships merits sustained study. To label the work merely an "anti-dowry message" and leave matters there would be to ignore the multiple levels of narrative conflict.

2. Composition and Theatrical Tradition: The Continuity of Social Drama

Lallan Prasad Thakur's theatrical work was never confined to written dialogue. Available reminiscences mention his acting and directing, the activity of the Mithilākṣar institution, and productions in several cities. Kusum Thakur recalls *Ādi Vā Ant* as his final dramatic screenplay and refers to its staging at Rabindra Bhavan, Jamshedpur. This is memoir evidence; it would be inappropriate to infer an otherwise undocumented performance date from it.

The memoir also states that after the production an attempt was made to adapt this narrative for a visual medium, with alterations to some scenes and dialogue. The published acting text and a possible production of its adaptation therefore cannot be assumed to constitute the same text. Literary criticism must rest upon the dramatic text's own construction; the memoir provides a context of theatrical culture only. Other celebrated plays by Lallan Thakur also appear in Maithili literary archives; in that continuity the concerns of *Ādi Vā Ant* belong to a contemporary current of social theatre.

3. The Title's Dilemma: Which Is the End, Which the Beginning?

The title *Ādi Vā Ant* poses an interrogative alternative. The end of an old tradition can itself become the beginning of a new relationship; yet every declaration of change does not bring actual social liberation. In the domestic resolution of the play, Ḍaulī and Aruṇ's decision to marry directly rejects caste

restrictions and demands for dowry. The subsequent public scene again asks how far the courage of one family can change the social system of dowry. The title's real tension resides between these two answers.

Seen thus, the title is not a ready-made conclusion but a question left to spectators. By what action can a social order that regards daughters as "burdens" and grooms as "valuable commodities" be brought to an end? And if the voice of resistance remains confined to ceremonial slogans, how credible is the claim to a new beginning? The final scene stages the title: it offers not merely a conclusion to the plot but a reconsideration of whether that conclusion suffices.

4. The Plot's Movement: From Domestic Humour to Public Deliberation

The play begins in the domestic atmosphere of *Bharadutiyā*, with banter among Kañcan, Ḍaulī, and their maternal uncle Ghanaśyām. The search for a groom, prevailing dowry rates, opportunism within a teacher's family, a marriage procedure conducted in the manner of government administration, Rāmdīn's pitiful appeal, the contractor's blocked bill, and Karuṇeś's crisis of conscience then become interconnected. For the self-interested intermediary marriage is a business of recommendations and fees; for Karuṇeś a relationship ought to rest on moral trust. The collision between these perspectives principally drives the action.

In the first major crisis Kañcan attempts to secure a signature on the corrupt bill; seeing Karuṇeś's anguish, she tears up the paper. Somewhat later, the announcement of a dowry-free marriage reassures the family, but as the appointed wedding date approaches the professor suddenly demands money. In the second and more acute crisis, Karuṇeś himself prepares to sign the corrupt bill. This time Ḍaulī snatches away and tears up the paper, explicitly proposing marriage to Aruṇ. After the domestic resolution, an additional public scene returns the question to society through the helplessness of a poor father and dialogue involving the playwright. This sequence gives the repeated crisis a meaningful difference.

5. The Bharadutiyā Opening: The Currency of Relations within Affection

The setting of *Bharadutiyā* is the traditional festival of affection between brother and sister. Yet from the outset the uncle Ghanaśyām speaks of the value of gifts, clients in court, and the benefits of contacts. The comic episode of a present brought for his sister being retained by his wife, Ḍaulī's questions, and the poetic teasing between the uncle and Śanicārā bring the domestic world alive. At first spectators laugh, but a persistent question already emerges beneath the humour: is the value of a relationship determined by affection or by its economic utility?

That question is the dowry problem in miniature. The uncle who makes light of bargaining over his sister's present later calculates lakhs of rupees in the marriage of his niece. The irony continues to develop between the opening festivities and the fear of social exclusion at the end. Connecting festive domestic intimacy with social avarice is a shrewd initial choice by the dramatist.

6. Karuṇeś: The Institutional Isolation of an Honest Engineer

Karuṇeś is established as an upright official in his working methods and a principled man in private conduct. Refusing the bill for a contractor's shoddy work, declining to use an official jeep for a private search for a groom, and resisting improper financial transactions at his daughter's wedding are scenes that take his honesty beyond declaration into practice. Treating the conveniences of government office as a public responsibility forms the basis of his character.

This resolve, however, produces a kind of moral isolation within his home. His wife and the uncle regard his "principles" as detached from the practical crises of life. Karuṇeś initially offers Rāmdīn a lecture rather than sympathy for his suffering. His integrity is consequently sincere but not faultless. The abstract purity of duty can sometimes conflict with immediate human assistance. The play presents him not as an unyielding stone but as a man who learns and wavers.

7. Kañcan: The Complex Voice of Fear, Domestic Life, and Moral Dilemma

It would be erroneous to regard Kañcan merely as a greedy wife or an obstacle to the plot. She understands that, despite her husband's high office, the household lacks wealth because of his honesty; she is also proud of that honesty. On one hand she rejects her brother's suggestion that dowry from her son's marriage should finance her daughter's wedding; on the other, fear for the daughter's uncertain future eventually drives her towards the improper bill. The contradiction measures social pressure rather than merely a flaw of character.

Maternal anxiety dominates Kañcan's language, but her decisions are also controlled by fear of the disgrace associated in society with a daughter's failed marriage. When she first tears up the paper it is a moment of understanding she has reached herself; when Ḍaulī later tears up the paper, her anger shows that the moral reversal has not lasted. In this instability the play discovers a poignant dimension of social realism: decent people can repeatedly be defeated by the burden of social convention.

8. The Lawyer Ghanaśyām: Comic Intermediary or Accomplished Broker of the System?

The maternal uncle Ghanaśyām is a figure of many meanings. He likes to be called a poet, displays pride in being a lawyer, and is easygoing in domestic

banter, but within moments discovers an opportunity for brokerage in the contractor's bill. He stimulates the schoolmaster's greed through false assurances and extracts a fee. Even when he sees the absurdity of Baṛkā Bābū's marriage "registration" for dowry, he seeks a practical way to settle it through personal connections. He is not opposed to the system; he moves around profiting from its weaknesses.

Not everything he says, however, is false. He knows the real rates of the marriage market better than Karuṇeś and has an acute capacity to recognise social hypocrisy. The play therefore does not make him a simplified villain. His knowledge fails to become ethical judgment and instead becomes an instrument of gain. As he makes the audience laugh, the uncle suggests that those who perpetuate an oppressive custom may recognise its injustice yet search for profit within it rather than seeking to change it.

9. The Class Registers of Humour: Śanicārā and Rāmdīn Answer Back

Śanicārā uses rhymes and couplets to ridicule uncle Ghanaśyām's language and pride in his position. The insistence on being called "maternal uncle" or "lawyer," the verbal inversion of *mokil* ("client"), and the business of a sandal and a poet briefly turn the social hierarchy of language upside down. A subordinate servant acquires a momentary right to speak. But the humour also makes clear the threats and inequalities embedded in the master–servant relationship.

Rāmdīn is a subordinate character of another kind. His economic position cannot protect him from demands for dowry. After he has already paid money to marry off his daughter, the extra cost of repairing the groom's house following an earthquake is also imposed upon the bride's family. Here the blow of the custom descends from the comfortable arguments of a senior official's household into the insecurity of everyday life. The entrance of this pathetic episode amidst humour extends the play's social reach.

10. Gulābmal and the Bill: From Document of Bribery to Dramatic Symbol

The contractor Gulābmal is not simply the external carrier of wrongdoing; he represents the profane association of state business with private profit. The withheld bill for shoddy work, "expenses" paid to reach the minister, a proposed share for the uncle, and immediate fees together depict corruption not as an accidental moral fall but as an institutional network. The uncle initially tries to enter that network; Kañcan too sees the document as a means of ending the household crisis.

The paper's dramatic career is particularly noteworthy. On the first occasion Karuṇeś signs it while expressing moral anguish and Kañcan tears it up. On the

second, Karuṇeś himself reaches the point of signing, when Ḍaulī snatches and destroys the paper. One stage object is employed twice in different contexts, and its recurrence intensifies the conflict. The paper here is not merely a bill but formal permission to sell a principle.

11. The Schoolmaster's Speech and the Rate of Dowry: Public Principles, Private Greed

The schoolmaster lectures his pupils against dowry, condemning the custom in morally forceful language. Yet when Karuṇeś visits in search of a groom, the man first performs an uncompromising rejection of dowry and then demands a large sum under the guise of conditions for his son's marriage. The fee for "salt and oil" at the schoolmaster's seat and the price of his son's marriage create a satirical parallel between two economic uses of education.

The dramatist is placing not education but the double morality lodged within educational institutions in the dock. The principles taught before pupils disappear from the teacher's private decisions. The uncle then exploits the same avaricious teacher, extracting money from him by falsely promising wealth. The teacher's self-deception and the intermediary's self-interest reinforce each other. The humour here has a sharp edge, for it directly questions the conduct of a public moral instructor.

12. Baṛkā Bābū's Marriage "Registration": The Marketplace Unmasked

At first the senior clerk, or *Baṛkā Bābū*, in the government office will not even listen to his visitors. His silence ends as soon as he receives a small banknote from the uncle. In discussing his son's marriage he uses the language of "registration," "offers," and serial numbers; instead of deciding on a groom's suitability, he prepares a comparative schedule of proposed sums. He gives his corrupt practice the theoretical appearance of equal opportunity. Through this absurd reasoning the play exposes the marriage market's open competition for dowry.

To dismiss this scene merely as a caricature would be inadequate. Within the claim to give "everyone a chance," the language of equality becomes a servant of unequal purchasing power in a market for human beings. Education, position, caste, and family connections enter directly into the calculation of value. Karuṇeś rejects the situation as an auction. Yet the question remains: in a society that sets a "price" on grooms, where can a daughter exercise her right to decide? Ḍaulī's later intervention supplies the decisive response.

13. Rāmdīn's Crisis: The Human Test of Idealism

The groom's family demands additional money for Rāmdīn's daughter. Karuṇeś initially refuses to lend him money, declaring that he cannot participate in the immoral practice of dowry. In principle that refusal is consistent, but to a

distressed subordinate its consequence feels like cruelty. Kañcan points out this emotional difference; Karuṇeś then admits his mistake and resolves to offer help.

The subtlety of this moment raises an important question: how is an injured person to be helped without endorsing the oppressive custom? Opposition to the system of dowry is not identical with the immediate protection of a family trapped by its violent demands. The play does not develop the dilemma into a comprehensive policy solution, but Karuṇeś's correction of himself certainly reveals its human complexity. An ideal requires not merely the courage to refuse but sensitivity to circumstances.

14. Ḍaulī: From the Courage to Question towards Self-Determination

From the outset Ḍaulī is no passive listener to social reasoning. She turns her uncle Ghanaśyām's dowry calculations into questions that entrap him, opposes the mentality that regards the birth of a son as an economic gain and a daughter as a loss, and openly expresses her wish to study and stand on her own feet. Education for her means self-reliance, not merely the acquisition of higher "commodity value" in the marriage market.

Most importantly, Ḍaulī refuses to accept that others must determine what constitutes her welfare. Her father wishes to abandon his ethical discipline to secure her marriage, her mother acts unwisely through fear for social standing, and their friend Aruṇ offers to save the situation through a loan: all three proposals are made in the name of "Ḍaulī's welfare." She asks where her own existence figures in these decisions. Such a question carries the play beyond the narrower boundaries of a father-centred denunciation of dowry.

15. Aruṇ's Presence: An Improvised Solution or Narrative Foreshadowing?

Aruṇ enters the early part of the play as an educated young man known to Ḍaulī. The families' acquaintance, discussions of education and employment, and mention of the problems concerning Munnī's marriage all prevent him from being an unknown rescuer who appears only at the last moment. Nevertheless, Ḍaulī's demand for a clear yes or no and Aruṇ's acceptance constitute a very abrupt dramatic turn.

Aruṇ's role has two meanings. Although he agrees with opposition to dowry, he remains entangled in the domestic expediency of offering a loan for his sister's marriage; Ḍaulī questions this inconsistency. Later Ḍaulī herself proposes marriage, and Aruṇ accepts by linking his answer to his family's permission. That single sentence discloses the surviving tension between the consent of the young and traditional familial approval. To call this an entirely unimpeded modern love marriage would claim more than the text permits.

16. The Rejection of Caste: From Critiquing Dowry to Breaching Social Boundaries

In Kañcan's initial reaction, Aruṇ is of "another caste" and thus not deemed a suitable possibility. When Ḍaulī herself chooses him at the domestic conclusion, that very difference becomes an occasion for strong opposition. Through this sequence the play reveals the connection between dowry and caste-based marital regulation: even if financial transactions are ended, caste's closed boundaries can survive.

Karuṇeś's final consent is therefore especially meaningful. He accepts not merely marriage without dowry but also rejects the supposedly indispensable prohibitions constructed in the name of caste and society. The play nevertheless does not portray daily married life thereafter, the real adjustment between the two families, or the long-term forms of caste-based opposition. The scene thus announces possible social transformation; it is not documentary proof of its completion.

17. Two Torn Papers: Dramatic Echo and Moral Inheritance

Kañcan tears up the first paper when Karuṇeś tells her that signing corruptly would destroy the self-respect he has earned over his lifetime. This is a moment of recognition between husband and wife. Kañcan recovers moral judgment from within her own dilemma. The second paper is torn by Ḍaulī. This time pressure has brought the father himself to the point of surrender, and the mother again supports the proposed decision. The new generation thus becomes the guardian of the older generation's moral legacy.

The difference between these two identical-looking actions is central to the analysis. On the first occasion, destroying the paper means saving the husband's honesty; on the second, the daughter refuses society's right to bargain over her life. The first act of resistance saves a household from corruption; the second transforms the household's decision-making process itself. Without this creative repetition, the development of the characters would be less evident.

Ḍaulī's refusal: the torn bill as dramatic testimony

18. The Professor's Demand: A Public Image of Principle and a Private Bargain

Ḍaulī's wedding is arranged without dowry in a respected teacher's family. The demand for money after every preparation has been made causes the collapse of domestic happiness. The professor is not directly present onstage; his actions are conveyed through dialogue coming from elsewhere and information over the telephone. His absence does not diminish his power: his demands encircle the entire household.

This episode is not merely a repetition of the greed previously encountered in the schoolmaster and Baṛkā Bābū. It also incorporates social prestige, an already arranged ceremony, the arrival of relatives, and fear of "what people will say" if the wedding fails. The crisis facing Ḍaulī concerns less the amount of money than the shame imposed in society's name. When the promise of a suitable groom turns into a condition of dowry, the narrative tension takes the form of the collapse of personal optimism. Karuṇeś's eventual wavering is the culmination of this prolonged pressure.

19. Private Morality and the State: The Social Production of Corruption

Dowry and bribery are shown becoming mutually necessary within the play. Karuṇeś opposes dowry himself and has stopped an improper government bill after detecting irregularities. Yet the social obligation to marry off his daughter comes to bear upon him so heavily that the very bill he has withheld becomes a means of corrupt action. In this sequence corruption is no longer exclusively the psychology of greed: the pressure of social norms drives him towards abusing institutional authority.

The connection cannot be turned into a general rule that "dowry causes all corruption." It is a particular causal relationship in the play's fictional world. Gulābmal's earlier commercial manipulation, the uncle's brokerage, and society's consumerist understanding of prestige proceed from different motives. Karuṇeś's crisis is a visible convergence of this network, through which the work exposes the tension between private moral integrity and corruption within public institutions.

20. The Language of Marital Commodification: Groom, Price, Register, and Dowry Trade

The play criticises the commodification of marriage at the level of language. The "rates" and "offers" for grooms, "registration," categories of money, motor vehicles, household goods, gold ornaments, and lists of gifts to accompany the bride all relocate relationships into market categories. The uncle turns the birth of a son into a calculation of prospective dowry income; Ḍaulī responds by raising the question of a woman's humanity.

In this area of the work, satire becomes not simply a language of moral prohibition but an alternative vocabulary. "Registration" becomes a marital "auction"; an "ideal marriage" becomes an advertisement for opportunistic prestige; a "gift" becomes pressure to consume; and "tradition" becomes a pretext for perpetuating inequality. Through such linguistic exposure, the playwright gives spectators an opportunity to recognise the economic violence concealed within everyday speech.

21. Dramatic Language: Maithili Folk Rhythm and the Ordering of Hindi and English Terms

Ghanaśyām's couplets, Śanicārā's rhymes, Ḍaulī's sharp counter-questions, Kañcan's emotional urgency, Karuṇeś's moral firmness, and Rāmdīn's pathetic appeals do not speak in the same register. The multilingual surface of the play mixes Hindi expressions and English terms of business and administration into Maithili dialogue. This mixture is not accidental linguistic impurity; it marks the speech practices of different social positions, educations, and offices.

Humour surrounding the image of the poet recurs throughout. The uncle desires recognition for his poetic talent, while Śanicārā and Rāmdīn expose the ridiculousness of his pride. The lightness of rhyming prepares listeners for the presentation of serious thought. Though verbal wit prolongs scenes in a number of places, it provides the basis for a theatrical mode of listening oriented towards ordinary audiences. Consequently, silent reading and spectators' experience of communal laughter will not be identical.

22. Theatrical Organisation: From the Household Interior to the Midst of the Audience

The principal scenes unfold in simple spaces such as the household drawing room, the teacher's premises, and Baṛkā Bābū's sitting room. Objects directly present onstage—papers, files, notes from a pocket, the telephone, lists, the torn bill—turn arguments expressed in dialogue into visual evidence. The telephone message from the professor has a particularly clear effect: an absent character's greed creates pandemonium throughout the house.

In the final scene, the play abandons the earlier domestic space and brings a character to the stage through the audience; a slogan-shouting procession crosses its foreground. Through this spatial change, the work treats its story not as "a family matter" but as a public question. The distance between spectators and actors is reduced; the significance of the technique is not that all boundaries disappear, but that the consequences of the narrative become a question of the spectator's social responsibility.

23. The First Resolution: Family Consent and Its Incompleteness

The scene in which Ḍaulī and Aruṇ agree to marry offers the possibility of a happy ending. Karuṇeś rejects objections based on caste bonds, Kañcan fears society's severe gaze, and people outside threaten a boycott. Karuṇeś's answer turns the argument against those who claim to guard social morality: why should a society that tolerates people demanding dowry wish to punish a family that rejects it?

The resolution is not without contradiction. The value of Ḍaulī's education and independent judgment is clear, but the final dramatic proof of her freedom is itself confined to a decision about marriage. Marriage is not wrong in itself; the question is how far the narrative leaves open her life plans, profession, and possible public role beyond marriage. The play opens a door to resistance but does not develop the subsequent social journey.

24. An Additional Final Scene: The Playwright Enters and Debates Directly with the Audience

The twelfth scene initiates a different theatrical arrangement after the domestic narrative. Amid an anti-dowry procession, a poor father searches for a groom for

his daughter; even the young men raising slogans postpone consideration of his proposal. An offstage voice answers the father's question by identifying itself as the "writer" and "playwright." This is properly understood as an innovative form of self-reference within the dramatic action: the work itself raises questions about its making and its impact.

To regard this scene simply as the next incident in the plot would obscure its distinctiveness. It offers a rejoinder to the private solution reached by Karuṇeś and Ḍaulī: if suitable and dignified alternatives are unavailable to large sections of society, how sufficient are one courageous marriage and the collective sound of slogans? The poor father questions the use of the play; the playwright's voice expresses the hope that it might influence at least one spectator. This is theatrical self-examination.

25. Slogans and Inaction: How Should the Twelfth Scene Be Read?

The procession in the twelfth scene is full of declarations renouncing dowry. Yet when an actual opportunity arises to help a father arrange his daughter's marriage, the young participants turn away and proceed. The distance between announced principles and actual decisions suddenly becomes visible. The episodes involving the teacher's sermon and the contractor's document now assume the scale of a broad public scene.

The scene's effective aspect is that the spectator can no longer remain securely in the position of one who merely "listens to the lesson." The spectator had been someone interrogating the society inside the play; now society directs a question back towards the spectator. There is, however, a degree of excessive directness in this creative attempt. The playwright's voice tries to state the final conclusion very explicitly, somewhat restricting the audience's independent construction of meaning. Self-reference and didactic speech coexist within a single scene.

26. The Play's Perspective on Women: The Achievement of Rebellion and the Residues of Moral Regulation

Ḍaulī's resistance is an important achievement of this play. She disagrees with her father, prevents an unethical signature, asks Aruṇ for explicit consent, and refuses to regard caste distinctions as mandatory. Kañcan's character likewise carries a multilayered experience of social pressure and domestic responsibility. It would therefore be unjust to dismiss the female characters as merely decorative or pitiable presences.

Yet in the final public scene and Karuṇeś's social warning, the possibilities of a daughter eloping, committing suicide, or becoming an unmarried mother if a marriage fails are used to generate fear. This language draws attention to possible social violence, but it also reiterates the older morality that regards alternative paths in a woman's life as signs of misfortune. It would be critically unjustifiable to treat unmarried motherhood itself as definitive proof of moral decline. Even while exposing social fear, the play sometimes adopts that fear's vocabulary.

Clearly recognising this contradiction is essential to a more adequate reading of women's autonomy.

27. Social Boycott: The Politics of Respectability and the Reinterpretation of Tradition

Kañcan repeatedly asks, "What will people say?" This is no mere domestic irritation; it signals the community's severe discipline over the honour of women and families. After the arranged wedding falls through, the fear of public shame seems almost unbearable to her. Finally Karuṇeś openly accepts the challenge of exclusion. In this change, an individual does not simply sever relations with the community but demands that the community itself be subjected anew to ethical judgment.

The dispute gives the word "culture" two meanings: first, a historically accumulated respect for custom; second, resistance to changing unjust rules. The play opposes the belief that tradition is valuable merely because it is traditional. Yet the final speech's association of modernity with a fear of "Western civilisation" is another simplification. To understand the work's sense of change as inclusive, its closing cultural dualism must therefore also be critically examined.

28. The Interchange of Humour and Pathos: The Effect of Popular Theatre

The opening scenes' humour among Ghanaśyām, Śanicārā, and Ḍaulī, the teacher's repeated ethical sayings, Baṛkā Bābū's absurd auction, and the uncle's ingenious fees connect the audience to the language of familiar social life. Through the recurrence of humour, the tone of economic violence gradually becomes more pronounced. At Rāmdīn's lament and Karuṇeś's moral disintegration, the same spectators must enter a different emotional landscape.

The strength of this creative structure is its refusal to separate social thought from entertainment. Humour exposes what is to be criticised; pathos discloses its human consequences. Yet the characters' repeated explanatory speeches sometimes slow the tension of the scenes. Particularly in the final public sequence, direct ideological proclamation begins to overwrite dramatic action. Here too one can observe the reciprocal tension between the communicative effectiveness of popular social theatre and artistic subtlety.

29. In the Light of Theatre Theory: From Entertainment to the Activation of Thought

The play's public conclusion can be read from the standpoint of modern political theatre. Bertolt Brecht stressed the need to give spectators opportunities to think about social relations; the twelfth scene of *Ādi Vā Ant* likewise questions the audience. This resemblance, however, does not justify declaring the play a direct

imitation of Brechtian method. The play's tone is also didactic and pathetic; rather than maintaining distance, it frequently seeks to create identification with the characters' suffering.

The importance of the final question is that the play does not consider Karuṇeś or Ḍaulī the sole agent of social reform. The writer himself doubts the extent of his power and regards the audience as possible collaborators. Theatre here is not the site of a complete solution, but an occasion for collective social self-examination. Through such questioning and self-criticism, the work moves somewhat beyond a narrative whose purpose is simply to deliver a clear "lesson."

30. Historical Distinctions in Law and Context

Legal prohibition of dowry transactions was established in India through a separate statute; however, the play's dialogue does not directly cite any specific provision of that law. This historical fact can be read as contemporary institutional background, but the dramatic characters' speeches must not be treated as court evidence or actual judicial reasoning.

The play's centre is not the literal definition of the law but the language of social acceptance and familial decision-making. The fictional world suggests that improper demands acquire the status of social normality despite legal prohibition. In this respect literature makes visible the fear, shame, greed, and resistance that characterise social conduct but are not disclosed by merely describing legal prohibitions.

31. Creative Limitations: Inspiring Courage and the Risk of Simplification

The contradictions must be viewed alongside the work's accomplishments. First, Ḍaulī and Aruṇ's decision to marry provides an emotionally forceful resolution, but the narrative does not dwell on the extended consent of the families, the practicalities of economic arrangements, or the caste complexities that will follow marriage. Second, although Kañcan's social fears are explored in depth, her final dissent is given insufficient conversational space. Third, the uncle, schoolmaster, Baṛkā Bābū, and professor become sharp allegorical figures of social greed; this figurative treatment somewhat narrows the characters' distinct psychological motives.

A fourth limitation is the language of the final warning, which treats alternative lives for women as signs of a frightening future. A fifth is the writer's direct answer, which at times explains the indirect implications of dramatic action too completely. Recognising these limitations does not lessen the importance of the play's people-oriented theatrical vision. Rather, it clarifies how dramatic writing that desires immediate social intervention must continually struggle between emotional communication and artistic complexity.

32. Conclusion: Not a Happy Ending to Change, but an Open Question of Social Consciousness

The essential strength of *Ādi Vā Ant* lies not simply in the character of an honest engineer but in rendering visible the network of relationships that makes his virtue helpless. Ghanaśyām's brokerage, the teacher's double standards, Baṛkā Bābū's auction of marriages, the professor's final demand, the contractor's file, Kañcan's fear, and Rāmdīn's helplessness together demonstrate that dowry is not merely an instance of personal greed but a structure of widely accepted conduct. Within this structure, a person who resists can come to seem impractical even to those closest to him.

Ḍaulī's opposition gives the work decisive energy. She refuses unethical advantages on her own behalf, saves her father from moral collapse, and expresses her wishes in choosing a husband. Yet the dramatist does not drop the curtain on this domestic victory. Through the poor father's question, the final scene again declares that one family's success is not society's universal liberation. "Beginning" and "end" are therefore not fixed points in time but names for an open ethical conflict between tradition and change. In this sense, and with its limitations, the work is an important attempt to awaken public judgment within the tradition of Maithili social drama.

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Chandā: The Encirclement of Private Life in the Name of Public Good

Donation, fear, middle-class insecurity, and linguistic satire in Lallan Prasad Thakur's one-act play

Abstract

In *Chandā*, the ordinary day off of a salaried householder becomes increasingly extraordinary under a succession of demands for public contributions. Organisers of a Mithila festival, solicitors invoking an āśram, a wrestler, a man claiming to be a flood victim, and finally young men displaying a weapon all cross the same domestic threshold. Courteous requests at the beginning, emotional pressure in the middle, and overt intimidation at the end form a discernible progression. The friction between Vijay Babu and his wife—over household expenditure, hospitality, compassion, and self-protection—constitutes the play's social structure. The one-act play does not simply oppose charitable giving; it asks why the citizen's consent and capacity to pay cease to command respect when a demand is made in the name of the public interest. Alongside its social critique, the play's popular theatrical humour, its dialogues in Maithili, Hindi, and Bhojpuri, its recurrent arrivals, and its open-ended conclusion merit particular scrutiny.

Keywords

Maithili one-act play; *Chandā*; public culture; middle class; financial pressure; linguistic theatre; fear; satire.

1. The Household Threshold and the Incursion of the Public Sphere

The centre of *Chandā*'s dramatic world is not a grand festival venue but the ordinary doorway of a home. The choice of location is deliberate. On one side of the threshold lie the family's limited income, meals, rest, and conversations between husband and wife; on the other stands a society invoking festivals, religion, sport, disaster relief, and public authority. Every caller assumes in advance that his own cause is unquestionably justified; consideration of the householder's means recedes into the background. The collision brings forth the play's governing question: is contributing to society a voluntary act, or a price exacted for the preservation of one's reputation?

Vijay Babu is not opposed to helping others in principle. He welcomes the prospect of a Mithila festival, yet the moment he says that he can afford five rupees he is subjected to contempt. The word *aukāt* (standing or means) becomes a judgment of social rank. Those collecting donations assess a person's worth not by what he actually offers but by their imagined estimate of his prosperity. Disagreement becomes an offence against society. This contradiction, compressed into a brief scene, establishes the entire ideological basis of the play.

2. The Mithila Festival: Cultural Prestige as Financial Display

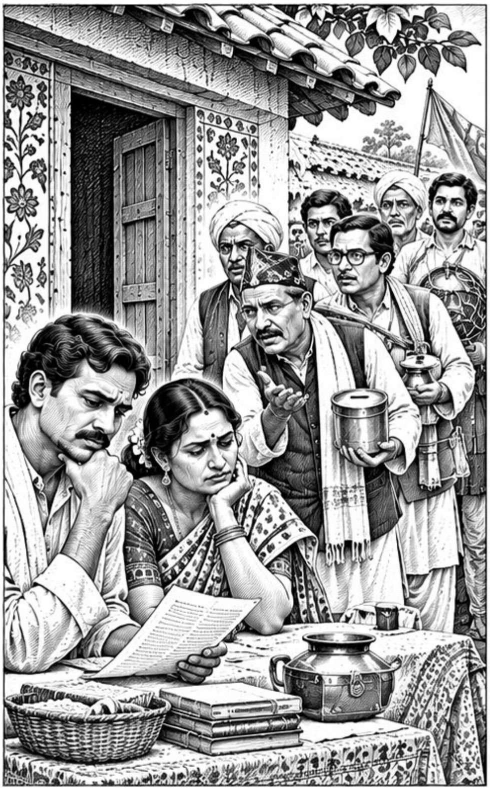
The first delegation claims affiliation with the Paramahaṃsa Lakṣmīnātha Gosāīṃ Maṇḍalī. The event's name, the dignities of its guests, and the glory of Maithili culture are placed in a single chain of associations. The initial show of respect quickly turns into a demand for payment. Against the anticipated contribution of four or five thousand rupees, Vijay Babu's five rupees are pronounced insignificant; under pressure, he eventually has to give fifty-one rupees. The issue of giving thus becomes less a financial question than one of public performance. The event itself may possess social value: the play attacks the practice of using that value to humiliate an individual, not the existence of the festival.

The organisers' response when Vijay Babu proposes consulting his wife is particularly revealing. They describe the sharing of household-budget decisions as a "disease of the people of Mithila." By belittling marital deliberation, they advance a definition of masculinity in which not consulting one's wife becomes a mark of prestige. The invocation of Vidyāpati lends this claim a veneer of cultural authority. Here the play gathers the indirect denigration of women and the thoughtless deployment of cultural names into a single satire.

3. The Wife: Household Economics and Contradictory Compassion

Vijay Babu's wife is more than an angry housewife. She asks how food is to be provided for the remainder of the month. Her question lies at the heart of the play's economic realism. Her husband yields to external social pressure, whereas she calculates the actual costs of daily consumption, the children's milk, and the kitchen. Through this female character, the play reveals who must bear, within the home, the consequences of ostentatious public generosity. It indirectly brings into view the value of domestic labour, which the collectors of donations treat as negligible.

Yet the playwright does not construct the wife as a fixed emblem of thrift. She is cautious when offering two rupees to visitors appealing on behalf of an āśram, but becomes compassionate again towards the dubious flood victim. Even after her husband exposes the exaggeration in the man's register, she remains in favour of giving him something. It would be easy to call this foolishness; the play's subtler implication is that it is difficult to distinguish reliably between the possible suffering of the poor and the stratagems of an impostor. Generosity and judgment are not enemies, but balancing them in a life under pressure proves difficult.



The household threshold: charity transformed into coercion

4. The Āśram, Song, and the Public Garb of Hypocrisy

The visitor called Uṛiyā, accompanied by a harmonium player, appears at the threshold singing in the name of an āśram and speaking the emotional language of religion. Blessings, wishes for the children's long life, and appeals for donations seek to awaken compassion. Displeasure with a gift of two rupees, however, together with a remark about the cost of a *bīṛī*, exposes a consumerist disposition within the religious claim. Dissatisfaction with the smallest offering towards what had been represented as selfless devotion marks the culmination of the satire.

In this episode, ethnic or linguistic identity is not the primary failing; the fault lies in opaque demands made in the name of charitable activity. The playwright identifies one character as "Uṛiyā," but the conduct of a single character provides no grounds for passing a general moral verdict on any community. The artistic force of the incident lies in the shape of the behaviour: the abrupt slide from the gentle sound of devotional song into hard bargaining over money. The discrepancy between language and intention creates immediate theatrical comedy.

5. The Wrestler's Milk and the Missing Rice Pudding

The wrestler invokes his regional reputation, his prizes, and a forthcoming wrestling contest. His initial request for a hundred or two hundred rupees and his subsequent appeal for a litre of milk are both couched in the language of mutual sympathy. The wife avoids parting with cash but cannot withhold the milk. When Vijay Babu returns with vegetables, he anticipates the modest pleasure of homemade rice pudding. Someone from outside has already drunk the milk: a small possibility of happiness has been extinguished.

Rice pudding (*khīr*) is an effective object-symbol in the play. It denotes neither a lavish feast nor the splendour of a celebration, but a minor joy of family life. By placing the demand for assistance in the name of public honour beside this ordinary food, the play shows that the experience of economic exploitation is measured not only in sums spent but also in deferred pleasures. The wife's double struggle—remaining courteous before guests and answerable for the household's finances—comes into collision within this single episode.

6. Two Zeros in the Register: The Manufacture of Evidence and the Erosion of Trust

A Telugu-speaking man says that floods have destroyed his home. Vijay Babu initially refuses to contribute, while his wife urges assistance. When the man produces a register, the nature of the allegation changes. Challenged about the five hundred rupees entered against a neighbour's name, he admits that he actually received five rupees and added two zeros himself. This small incident raises a large question of institutional trust. A document that ought to establish credibility becomes an artificial instrument for increasing pressure.

The text does not, however, suggest that one man's dishonesty invalidates relief for all disaster victims. Its questions concern the verifiability of donations, the reliability of accounts, and the preservation of goodwill towards the helpless. The wife refuses to abandon the possibility of charity; the husband begins to suspect fraud behind every appeal. Both mentalities become symptoms of a grave civilisational predicament: cooperation is impossible without trust, yet unsafe without evidence.

7. The Final Delegation: From Cooperation to Extortion

Finally, four young men enter under the pretence of collecting donations for worship. Their behaviour moves from insulting sexual harassment of the wife to mockery of civility, then to a receipt for two hundred and fifty rupees, and finally to a pistol. Every covering of social solicitation is stripped away in turn. Their statement that everyone in the neighbourhood pays a monthly contribution suggests an organised and recurring system of extortion. For the first time, Vijay Babu refuses with sufficient firmness, but the display of the weapon leaves the possibility of violence in force.

The published text ends this episode with "to be continued" (*kramaśaḥ*). It would therefore be improper to assert what Vijay Babu ultimately does, how much money he pays, or whether police assistance arrives. The effect of the available narrative resides precisely in that unresolved instant: the audience recognises that a debate over social responsibility has turned into a crisis of bodily safety. The open ending sharpens the exposure of coercive force concealed within ostensibly civil society.

8. Multilingual Humour and Social Hierarchy

The play's dialogue makes Maithili, Hindi, and Bhojpuri voices collide. The family's primary domestic speech is Maithili; the wrestler speaks Bhojpuri; the āśram's visitors employ a Hindi-mixed idiom; the Telugu character raises the question of linguistic distance; and the final young men threaten in urban Hindi. The mixture is no ornament: each new language announces a new social role at the household threshold. The languages of supposed civility, religion, suffering, and force all converge upon the demand for money.

This multilingualism also calls for critical caution. Humour arises partly from the characters' marked pronunciation, which spectators may readily accept as comic, but linguistic difference is not itself the cause of fraud or stupidity. Criticism must distinguish the characters' social practices from their linguistic identities. The playwright's mastery of the popular stage lies in making successive manners of speaking transform a scene almost as soon as a new visitor enters.

9. The One-Act Form: Repetition, Intensification, and Limitation

Chandā does not depend upon elaborate scenic changes. One house, a husband and wife, and a door repeatedly answered constitute sufficient theatrical resources. The first demand provokes momentary laughter; after the second and third visits, repetition itself becomes oppressive; the next comparable episode offers evidence of deception; and the pistol at the end silences the audience's laughter. This graduated intensification is a substantial achievement in the construction of dramatic meaning.

Its limitation is that most of the visitors appear as social types rather than psychologically individualised persons. This artistic choice sharpens the satire but allows comparatively little space for the positive possibilities of genuine collective assistance. Nor is the recurrent disagreement between Vijay Babu and his wife finally resolved. Nevertheless, the play's energy should be measured not by the absence of elaborate subplots but by its ability to concentrate the pressure of numerous public relationships within a confined space.

10. The Progressive Corruption of "Cooperation": From Word to Stage Action

The gradual transformation of a word's meaning is one of the play's formal distinctions. The first delegation speaks of "cooperation"; Vijay Babu asks how much cooperation is expected. The reply immediately introduces the word

chandā, a monetary contribution. At that instant a public value is reduced to a sum of rupees. Five rupees was a voluntary decision, but it is dismissed in the language of *aukāt* and prestige. The religious delegation arrives bearing blessings and devotional song; the wrestler asks for food in the name of honour; the purported flood victim tells a tale of distress; and the young men demanding contributions for worship finally produce a receipt and a weapon. The outward language changes continually, while the unilateral power of the demand at the threshold steadily increases.

The "receipt" also assumes a significant symbolic function in this progression. The first delegation fixes the value of the donation by invoking its own social standing; the Telugu visitor inflates figures in his register; the final young men order a receipt to be issued for two hundred and fifty rupees. A document that ought to maintain a public account of obligations becomes an instrument for imposing an amount. The critical issue here is not merely the economics of charity but a crisis in the credibility of written evidence.

Vijay Babu is most humiliated when he attempts to exercise personal judgment. Considering his household expenditure, consulting his wife, and refusing the amount demanded are three ordinary civic rights. The visitors, however, successively construe them as miserliness, weakness, and disobedience. Thus the "donation" named in the title ceases to signify an unqualified social virtue and comes to designate public pressure against private dissent. The work's genuine act of resistance is to raise an ethical question about the word itself.

11. Conclusion: The Right of Consent and Public Ethics

Chandā does not celebrate a householder's stinginess; it demands respect for voluntary consent. A person offers five rupees according to his means, but the sum demanded of him is converted into a test of prestige. While leaving open the possibility that religion, culture, sport, relief work, and worship may all serve society, the play shows how each can also provide an avenue for fraud, humiliation, and intimidation. Its humour targets not the impulse to help but the unchecked authority constructed under the pretext of receiving assistance. For this reason the one-act play becomes an effective social satire in defence of accountability in public organisations and dignity in private life.

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Green Room: Performance Behind Performance and the Ironies of Discipline

A formal critique of Lallan Prasad Thakur's one-act play about a community of theatre practitioners

Abstract

Green Room transforms a play being prepared behind the stage into a play in its own right. Among the dancer, the performer of a beggar's role, the clerk, the queen, the soldier, the king, the make-up worker, and numerous mothers, the director attempts to organise a coherent scenic world. Each performer, however, places domestic standing, personal choice of costume, cinematic imagery, or family instructions above the demands of the role. Humour arises from these conflicts, but the work signifies more than ridicule of amateur actors. It interrogates the distinction between performance and actual identity, between training and individual wishes, and between theatrical discipline and the boundaries of social domination. Although set "behind the curtain," the play discovers precisely there the true centre of a public theatrical drama.

Keywords

Green Room; rehearsal; theatrical discipline; role; parental intervention; visual humour; self-reflexive drama.

1. The Public Scene Behind the Theatre Curtain

Traditionally, the green room is the place where a performance is prepared. Here performers assume the identities they will present on stage. Thakur's one-act play exposes this intermediate zone to the audience. As the curtain rises, make-up, tabla, dancing, costumes, the mothers' activities, and the director's mounting anxiety are all visible at once. The drama advances not through the single objective of one principal protagonist but through a succession of incongruous outcomes in minor preparations. This spatial arrangement means that each new entrance generates another problem rather than resolving the previous one.

Conventionally, we suppose that a fictive world is constructed upon the stage while real society remains outside it. Here the situation is reversed: before the play has even begun, real society's pursuit of status, maternal affection, cinematic fantasies, and struggles over control have spread behind the curtain. The rehearsal room has itself become a social stage. Comparison with Erving Goffman's account of social presentation is instructive: individuals alter their conduct across social settings to protect an image of themselves. This is, however, a critical analogy only; there are no grounds for asserting that the one-act play was written as an illustration of Goffman's theory.

2. The Dancer and Cinematic Imitation

The dancer's first disagreement concerns the suitability of her dancing for a royal-court scene. The director wants a dance appropriate to the character's historical and dramatic setting; the dancer announces her intention of imitating a dance performed by the film actress Hema Malini. Freedom of expression and situational coherence thus emerge as distinct questions. The dancer does not argue for adopting a newly developed style of movement; she simply treats a film sequence she has watched as the standard to be followed.

When her mother protects her from the director's rebuke, his authority over rehearsal is represented as a personal insult. He finally concedes that everybody may dance as they please. His capitulation is funny, but it also exposes the disintegration of the collective discipline required backstage. The playwright does not blame cinematic influence alone: the real incongruity lies in failing to understand the relation between what a performance is about and the movement used to express it.

3. The Beggar Dressed as a Prince: Acting and Social Respectability

The actor playing the beggar appears dressed like a prince, in accordance with his mother's instructions. The director explains the need for torn clothing, but the mother sees the request as an insult to her child's *aukāt*, his social standing. One of the play's most serious questions emerges here: representing a poor character and personally assuming the visible appearance of poverty are not the same thing. In the mother's eyes, adopting the outward marks of the social condition to be portrayed threatens the prestige of her family.

The distance between the costume and the beggar's role supplies the humour. The actor can utter a "poor and helpless" character's lines, but his family will not acknowledge that clothing, too, is a sign with social meaning. The scene thus exceeds the limits of a dispute over clothes. Acting poor is acceptable in fine garments, whereas the visual signs of real destitution are regarded as humiliating. A class-inflected imagination stands in opposition to theatrical "truth."

4. The Clerk's Spectacles and the Resistance of Props

The performer playing the clerk puts on his father's strong prescription glasses and falls because he cannot see properly. The director had wanted spectacles without corrective lenses. Rather than lending "authenticity," the actual glasses obstruct the possibility of acting. The episode clarifies the distinction between an everyday object and a theatrical prop: its meaning on stage is determined by its function in the performance, not solely by its original practical use in life.

The director's comic observation that one can play a blind person without being blind is compounded by maternal intervention. The mother cannot bear the suggestion that her child should act blind; she treats the words as a judgment on

his actual condition. The confusion between image and role returns. The play repeats its central premise in a fresh form, but the stakes vary each time: first style, then class, and now physical equipment and parental anxiety.

5. The Queen's Sari, the Soldier's Mace, and Scenic Signs

The costume required for the queen is unavailable: the mother refuses to lend a good sari from home. Unlike the dancer's case, the issue here is not the performer's preference but the allocation of resources. The family is unwilling to bear the expense of costume and attempts to transfer responsibility to the director. When participation in performance and responsibility for its material requirements are kept separate, the entire scenic arrangement becomes uncertain.

The soldier brings a mace instead of a sword and cites Hanumān in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as his example. This produces a discrepancy between the dramatic-historical setting and the popular mythological imagination. The role belongs to "the king's soldier," the prop to "Hanumān," and the confidence to the actor himself: the triangle creates humour without elaborate technical devices. The playwright shows how an error of props may amount not merely to a technical mistake but to a collision between different cultural imaginaries.

6. The King: The Frightened Body and Theatrical Reality

The king's stomach trouble, repeated visits to the lavatory, and appearance at rehearsal wrapped only in a towel constitute the height of the play's bodily comedy. From the director's standpoint, the king's costume, crown, and prescribed movements are indispensable. From the actor's standpoint, the overwhelming problem is the fear that his towel will slip. The imagined dignity of playing a king and the exposed insecurity of a body on stage undo one another.

It would be inadequate to dismiss this episode as merely coarse humour. Remembering his lines makes the actor nervous; stage fright takes the form of a bodily reaction. This is a comic representation of a real difficulty of amateur theatre. The director offers reassurance, but as the rehearsal begins, both the towel and the text are imperilled. Rather than listening to the story of a royal court, the spectators witness the usually invisible vulnerabilities of the labour of acting.

7. The Director: Not an Omnipotent Authority but a Figure of Perpetual Compromise

The director occupies the centre of the play, but he is no absolute ruler. He is formally responsible for the suitability of every role, yet the parents' pressure, the performers' wishes, and limited resources force him to surrender one decision after another. His repeated gestures of clutching his head, invoking God, rebuking someone and then apologising are themselves dramatic mechanisms. Despite the status signified by the title "director," he possesses very little power to enforce his choices.

The psychological subtlety of this character lies in his anger without withdrawal: he never abandons the production. Responsibility for collective work binds him to the last moment. His concessions are not simply cowardice; they also express the practical constraints of popular theatre without adequate resources. Nevertheless, a succession of immediate compromises destroys the shared design that gives a performance meaning. The one-act play emphasises the need for collective discipline without treating personal dignity as expendable.

8. The Mothers: Protection and Control

Several mothers in the play stand up for their own children. It would be easy to label their affection a mere obstruction, but it bears a double meaning under critical scrutiny. Child and adolescent performers require protection; humiliating direction can indeed be improper. In this play, however, the mothers frequently begin deciding matters of role, timing, materials, and acting themselves. What might have been direct participation turns into parental control.

The director's repeated forms of address, "Mātā-jī" and "Bahin-jī," meanwhile preserve a code of social courtesy. He needs cooperation, but the language of command threatens to rupture the relationship. When the mothers refuse to leave the rehearsal space, the distinction between "backstage" and "stage" ceases to operate in practice. The play's domestic satire centres on this incomplete reconciliation of affection with discipline.

9. Theatrical Design: One Place, Multiple Scattered Centres

Structurally, the play is an unstable ensemble scene. No single incident is expanded into a climax. Instead, a dispute over dance, an argument about clothes, an accident with spectacles, the problem of the sari, the incongruous mace, and the frightened king cumulatively produce the crisis. The director's intermittent calls function as dramatic ligatures. Time pressure—the performance is due to begin in half an hour—makes every minor mistake urgent.

The published one-act play, however, stops at a misunderstanding over dialogue during rehearsal. The available text gives no account of whether the actual stage performance succeeded or failed. It is therefore more accurate to call this a narrative of failed coordination in preparation than a definitive story of an "unsuccessful performance." The comic effect resides in what the spectators infer, not in the declaration of an ultimate result.

10. The Ethical Centre of Laughter: Actors' Failures or Organisational Deficiency?

The actors and their parents bear the brunt of the play's immediate ridicule. Yet each mishap also exposes a question concerning collective production. Who is to arrange stage costumes and props? Why were actors assigned roles whose conventions they did not understand? How should the terrified king have been prepared psychologically? Who has the authority to decide the limits of a dance style? The play does not answer these questions, but their force becomes apparent through the accumulation of unplanned activities. A critic should therefore resist the temptation to stop at laughing at the actors' supposed incompetence.

The progressive intensification of the rehearsal's time crisis is equally significant. A programme scheduled to begin in half an hour should in fact have been preceded by sustained instruction, practice, and coordination. Instead, everyone seeks an instant solution suited to individual wishes. To save time, the director grants what each person asks for, but immediate peace compounds longer-term incoherence. Thus the absence of training in *Green Room* appears not as a political or economic speech but as a succession of tangible events involving bodies and objects.

The limitations in the representation of the mothers must be considered in the same context. Their objections produce comedy, but the work at moments risks equating affection with selfishness and lack of judgment. It does not

independently explore their economic situations, participation in theatre, or access to organised training. A more nuanced conclusion than "the mothers are obstacles" is that the division of responsibilities between families and the theatrical institution has failed. To perceive this ecological or systemic failure through laughter is the lasting critical value of the one-act play.

11. Conclusion: Learning to Act Before Acting

Green Room's distinctive achievement is to make the actors' inner preparation itself a spectacle. Clothes, spectacles, towel, mace, and crown acquire meanings beyond their material existence, while the assigned roles and the performers' actual social images obstruct one another. Even while satirising amateur theatre, the play preserves awareness of its practical difficulties. How a collective art can emerge amid personal vanity, cinematic imitation, family control, and a scarcity of materials remains a theatrically urgent question. A serious proposition survives within the laughter: before one can perform a part on stage, one must accept the difference between the role and the person.

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Suitcase: Rumour, Power, and the Political Spectacle of Visual Evidence

Accusation, the media, rural objects, and public trust in a one-act play by Lallan Prasad Thakur

Abstract

Suitcase dramatises the process by which an unidentified object is transformed into a political crisis. At first, nobody knows who owns the suitcase discovered at a minister's residence. Visitors speculate that it contains a bomb or money paid as a bribe; conjecture develops into opposition allegations, journalists' questions, police deployment, the chief minister's anxiety, and public slogans. Finally, a visitor from the countryside, the minister's maternal uncle by marriage, opens the case with a key and reveals finger-millet flour, dried pumpkin dumplings, clarified butter, elephant-foot yam, and domestic provisions. The play disproves the immediate accusation but does not thereby dispose of the larger question of corruption. This study examines the circulation of rumour, the absence of verification, political image-making, the cultural role of the rural character, the theatricality of the media, and the subtle satire of the final photograph.

Keywords

Suitcase; political satire; rumour; media; evidence; public trust; vernacular speech; theatrical object.

1. The Unidentified Suitcase: The Arrival of an Object and the Birth of a Narrative

The play begins on the ordinary veranda of a minister's residence. An old gatekeeper is leaving on holiday, a new gatekeeper hurriedly assumes responsibility, and a suitcase left under a table remains without an identified owner. The playwright does not devise an extraordinary spectacle to generate tension; through an error in the transfer of responsibility, he makes an ordinary object the centre of public conjecture. The distance between the object's actual contents and the images constructed in the characters' minds is the source of virtually all the humour in the play.

The suitcase makes no accusation of its own. Allegations emerge from the language of those who describe its contents before looking inside. First comes the fear of a bomb, then an estimate of five to seven lakh rupees, and finally a categorical accusation involving ten lakh. An unchanged object thus acquires successive social meanings. Most importantly, the absence of proof first generates curiosity and subsequently the language of certainty. Through this transformation, political preconception itself takes the place of evidence.

2. The Gatekeepers' Social Position and Distance from the Seat of Power

The first gatekeeper's anxiety about catching a train and his holiday granted after six months anchor the opening in administrative routine. The minister's residence is an edifice of official prestige, but its functioning depends on the labour and time of ordinary employees. The first gatekeeper leaves without a detailed handover; the second remains ignorant of the object. Where security should supposedly be indispensable, a small failure to communicate becomes the occasion for an uproar extending across the entire state.

The second gatekeeper comes from the minister's village, and his speech conveys intimacy, recommendation, and familiarity. Such proximity between political authority and village relationships supplies a background of relaxed administrative control. Yet it would be improper to declare the gatekeeper corrupt on the strength of this mistake: the text shows his ignorance, not evidence of taking a bribe. The dramatic fault consists instead in an uncertain division of responsibility and the unreliability of assertions.

3. The First Leap of Conjecture: "Suitcase Bribery"

At first, the visitors discuss whether it will be possible to obtain an audience with the minister. The ironic treatment of the minister as a "god" points to inequalities in access to government. Once the suitcase enters the conversation, a visitor invokes the familiar idea of "suitcase bribery." It sounds instantly credible because the social imagination of corruption already exists. At this very point the audience sees that a plausible surmise and a verified fact are not identical.

Another visitor considers seeking police assistance, but distrust of police independence prompts the decision to approach an opposition leader instead. This transition is the play's structural turning point: the question of an administrative investigation immediately becomes material for a political campaign. Moral indignation may be justified, but indignation does not itself constitute conclusive evidence of wrongdoing. The play renders that logical leap in sharp humour.

4. Phūlkumārī Devī: Opposition Politics and a Conclusion Reached in Advance

Phūlkumārī Devī enters with slogans, supporters, and the press. From the outset her political speech is declarative: the minister has been caught red-handed, ten lakh rupees are in the suitcase, and the government must resign. The words create the impression that the event is already established; the suitcase, however, has not yet been opened. The opposition demands evidence but has already decided the outcome before evidence can emerge.

This is not merely a mockery of the democratic right to oppose; it exposes a contradiction within the practice of opposition. Demanding the presence of

judicial officers and investigating agencies may be a legitimate call for accountability. Announcing a public verdict of guilt without awaiting their investigation, however, turns legal procedure into the surmises of a crowd. Phūlkumārī's character is constituted less by individual cunning than by the role politics requires her to perform. She is unwilling to abandon her narrative even in the absence of proof.

5. Minister and Chief Minister: The Protection of Image, Not Innocence

The minister denies the allegation and professes ignorance of the object. The repeated invocation of his "honest" image itself produces uncomfortable laughter. When the chief minister arrives, his first question is not who owns the suitcase, but why a suitcase full of money was left outside. In other words, the highest official's assumption scarcely differs from that of the opposition. His main concerns are the difficulty of facing the public and the prospect of his government's collapse.

The minister's denial does not mean that the play establishes his complete innocence or the purity of the entire political establishment. The suitcase opened at the end clarifies only the particular allegation under discussion. It would be methodologically unsound to derive an all-embracing verdict on other accusations from the outcome of one incident. The play's critical force lies in showing how the statements of minister and opposition alike lose credibility under the pressures of public performance.

6. Journalism: Questions, Satire, and Prejudice

Two journalists turn the episode into a subject of public debate. Their questions combine genuine curiosity, instantaneous wit, and an inclination to damage reputations. When the minister insists that he knows nothing about the suitcase, one journalist asks whether perhaps he knows about another suitcase. Within the atmosphere of accusation, this retort turns suspicion into a verbal weapon.

Questioning Phūlkumārī Devī about the basis of her estimate of the suitcase's value exemplifies interrogative journalism. Yet the joke about guessing the contents of clothing and household materials "as a woman" also exploits a gender stereotype. Criticism must keep two levels distinct: the journalist tests a political claim, but his own language may reveal a conventional attitude towards women. Humour is not invariably proof of impartial social judgment.

7. Radio, Police, and Crowd: The Expansion of the Scene Through Sound

Through news reporting, an incident occurring before the minister's house turns into a crisis felt throughout the city. Radio bulletins, references to Section 144, police deployment, bomb experts, and constant sloganeering enlarge the

theatrical space through sound and action. An event of statewide political consequence is evoked within the limits of a modest stage set. Sound here is not mere background; it is a vital force of the drama.

In the broadcast, however, the opposition's statement is explicitly identified as a "claim"—an important distinction. The play does not declare news reporting inherently false; it exposes a problem of social reception: in the public atmosphere, a specific expression of suspicion begins circulating as though it were true. The din pushes verification further into the background. Everyone who enters the visible scene arrives with an established conclusion; the suitcase itself remains silent.

8. The Maternal Uncle: A Rural Body Interrupting the Political Spectacle

The actual owner is a rural visitor, the brother of the minister's wife, referred to as *Māmā*. His tooth-cleaning twig, water pot, sacred thread, cloth bag, and manner of speaking introduce a visual world entirely different from the language of political spectacle. So far the characters have spoken in conjectures and accusations; the uncle is concerned with keeping his belongings safe, meeting his sister, and attending to his immediate physical needs. His unexpected arrival alters the scale of the drama.

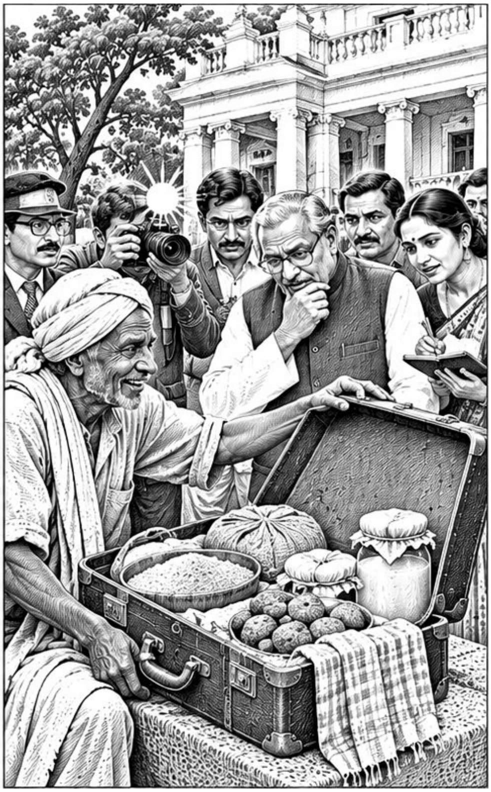
The uncle's account of alighting from an early train and going towards the Ganges to answer a call of nature places bodily routine beside political exceptionalism. Behind the object that spectators have imagined to contain ten lakh rupees lies an ordinary traveller's inconvenience. Being "rural," however, is no guarantee of truth: verification will depend on the key and examination of the contents. The uncle succeeds as a character because, comically, he turns the process of inquiry back towards the object itself.

9. Key, Sacred Thread, and Inventory: The Material Presence of Proof

The inspector general's proposal is decisive: to test the claim of ownership, the key must be produced and used to open the suitcase. The key tied to the uncle's sacred thread becomes a concrete sign connecting the object with its owner. This small action reduces hours of slogans and allegations to a simple procedure of examination. The opened case contains finger-millet flour, dried pumpkin dumplings, pure ghee, yam from the family garden, a *dhotī*, and an *aṅgā* (upper garment).

It is insufficient to describe these things simply as unexpected comic contents. As gifts brought from a rural household, they summon a world of sibling affection, food memory, and local labour. Finger millet and yam, unlike the imagined political cash, are articles of subsistence; against the fictive "ten lakh," they give trust a different significance. Rather than distributing money, the uncle is

concerned to preserve the provisions he has brought for his sister. This concern distinguishes him from the crowd.



The opened suitcase: the material test of political allegations

10. The Final Photograph: Truth as Material for Spectacle

After the suitcase is opened, a photographer asks the uncle to "pose." At first the uncle understands the request as an attempt to obtain some of the suitcase's contents. The misunderstanding produces further laughter; eventually the flash goes off and the lights fade. In the final instant, the discovery of truth is itself converted into a news photograph. The text does not establish for whose benefit the image will be used, how the crowd will respond, or whether the accusers will apologise.

This unresolved condition brings out the play's political subtlety. The truth has been found inside the object, but there is no guarantee that its public meaning will become fixed at once. The media have acquired a new spectacle. In considering this distance between reality and its representation, Goffman's idea of the "presentation of self" offers a comparative point of reference; it would nevertheless be unjustified to derive the play's form from any one theory.

11. Dramatic Structure: A Swift Event and the Limits of Satire

The action centres upon a single object. Groups of characters accumulate successively: gatekeepers, visitors, the opposition, the press, the minister, the chief minister, police, and the uncle. The pace intensifies through voices, slogans, and entrances, without needing to reproduce an actual crowd on stage. At the beginning, the question is "Whose suitcase?"; in the middle, it becomes "How large is the bribe?"; at the end, the answer returns to the original question. This circular construction is the source of the play's economy.

Several characters, however, remain little more than social types. The journalist's gendered jokes and the opposition's single-minded insistence simplify political discussion. Protest continues even after the bomb expert's alarm has proved groundless, while the complexities of institutional procedure receive scant consideration. Despite these limitations, the one-act play becomes a vivid metaphor for the manufacture of panic because it stages the journey of conjecture instead of merely lecturing about it.

12. The Displacement of Responsibility Between Government, Opposition, and Public

Within the play's political arrangement, blame does not belong exclusively to one party or leader. The minister claims ignorance, the chief minister protects a damaged image, the opposition amplifies the theatrical force of allegations, journalists punctuate their questions with satirical thrusts, and the police attempt to maintain order. Through all this, ordinary people appear largely as a chanting crowd; the process of decision-making is not transparent to them. Each slogan lends the affair a new meaning, yet no one immediately thinks of the simple means of opening the suitcase.

The inspector general's conduct is especially important. The chief minister begins moving towards an order for a baton charge; the inspector general first asks leave to attempt a peaceful resolution. He proposes checking the possible evidence of ownership—the key. At that moment, the play opens the possibility of institutional judgment without violence. This is not grounds for declaring the police as a whole a neutral ideal, since the public's earlier mistrust of them has also been mentioned. The playwright makes room for divergent responses within an institution, rather than one categorical verdict.

The notion of a public official as a "god" appears at the beginning. Visitors wishing to see the minister depend upon the gatekeeper's goodwill. The question of unequal access and distance from democratic authority arises at that point. Later the rumour about the object converts this distance into a public storm of distrust. A genuine basis for estrangement may exist even where the particular accusation is false. Preserving this fine distinction is the play's ethical lesson. Just criticism cannot be established without facts; nor does the exposure of one false accusation extinguish the right to question authority.

13. Conclusion: The Democratic Distance Between Suspicion and Evidence

Suitcase's principal achievement is to compel a distinction between the legitimate need for public suspicion and the destructive speed of unverified accusation. Investigation of a minister's integrity may be indispensable; proclaiming an unknown object to contain a predetermined sum in bribe money is a separate act. The uncle arrives with his key, and the meaning of the affair changes. In this reversal resides the playwright's social intention: if political consciousness relies on suspicion without examination, spectacle will prevail over truth. The food brought from the countryside and the journalist's final flash combine to make the play a memorable visual satire.

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Maithili Film: Linguistic Identity, the Understanding of Acting, and the Conflict of Cultural Imitation

The aspiration to filmmaking and the comic failure of casting in Lallan Prasad Thakur's one-act play

Abstract

In *Maithili Film*, the aspiration to make a motion picture in a regional language becomes entangled in a succession of incongruous auditions. The producer professes to be searching for authentic Maithil actors, but his conduct is governed by financial dominance and impulsive decisions. To demonstrate performance, the director must successively stand in as a dog, a son, an adversary, and a protagonist. Candidates cannot distinguish the characters from their own private lives; their insistence on popular film songs comes into conflict with the local song tradition; and a candidate for the villain's part actually assaults others in the name of acting. Within this comic succession lie questions about the film market, imitation, cultural identity, the criteria of selection, and creative labour. The one-act play invites us to understand the failure of local art not simply as the incompetence of performers but also as the consequence of incoherent control within the institution of production.

Keywords

Maithili Film; casting; acting; cultural identity; cinematic imitation; producer; director; popular satire.

1. The Dream Called "Film": Subject and Problem

The play opens with a table, two chairs, and a conversation between producer and director. The producer has undertaken the financial risk of making a Maithili film. He complains that previous ventures either engaged famous performers from outside the region or recruited actors on the basis of family connections. Such a statement initially inspires confidence in the possibilities of local talent. Almost immediately, however, the producer asserts his financial control over the director, restricting independence in artistic decisions at the very outset.

In this opening the playwright establishes a consequential institutional question: art in a regional language cannot succeed through intention alone; it requires credible selection procedures, an understanding of acting, financial discipline, and collective labour. The producer publicly demands "real artists," yet he himself raises the subject of political recommendations and displays his own prejudices before assessing the candidates. This discrepancy generates the satire.

2. Little Phūlkumārī: Confusion Over Words, Objects, and Acting

During the audition of a child performer, the little girl supplies the different names by which her family calls her. The producer and director seek a single prescribed name; in her speech, the distinction between affectionate domestic names and formal identity is unclear. This slippage of childhood language initiates the comedy. Yet before seeing her perform, the producer praises her looks and even considers engaging her mother. The divergence between artistic judgment and attraction to outward appearance makes the first audition not the first test but the first failure.

The audition requires the child to feed biscuits to a dog. Because there is no dog, the director is forced to play one himself. The child refuses to imagine a human being as a dog and eventually eats the biscuits herself. The elementary "let us suppose" convention of acting breaks down. The fault, however, is not wholly the child's: the producer has provided neither an appropriate partner nor suitable cues and age-appropriate instructions. A theory of performance must interpret the incident as a failure of coordination in its entirety.

3. The Director's Body: Who Is Really Being Auditioned?

The producer speaks the language of creative authority but transfers risk onto the director's body. The director's dignity is made ridiculous when he must play the dog; in the scene with the priest he becomes a temporary son; at the end he must also endure blows from the candidate for the villain's role. This recurrence is among the play's most meaningful arrangements of theatrical objects and bodies. The person nominally identified as "director" becomes, in practice, the executor of everyone else's wishes.

The more the director's body becomes a specimen of acting, the less he is able to direct. This satire upon the unequal relationship between artistic and financial authority constitutes a serious commentary on the inner structure of a regional film industry. If the play's humour is restricted to supposedly foolish candidates, the institutional disorder created by the producer becomes invisible. An imbalance of power is itself one cause of the unsuccessful auditions.

4. The Priest's Role: Rejecting the "Let Us Suppose" Convention

The candidate for the priest's role cannot distinguish the imaginary world of acting from his private family. When told that the character's son is dissolute, he interprets the statement as an insult to his real son and protests. The director temporarily casts himself as the "boy" for the audition, but the priest again argues from real age and paternity. The imaginary convention of acting, based upon provisional acceptance of a fictional identity, fails.

The contradiction reaches its height when, once the dialogue begins, the priest strikes the director furiously with a stick. He believes himself to be acting with remarkable intensity; the director suffers actual injuries. The boundary between

"performance" and "real action" collapses upon the stage. The performer misunderstands the fictional situation, yet its consequences occur in the real body. The playwright makes the incongruity effective not through didactic explanation but through a staged scene of physical blows.

5. The Producer: Cultural Redeemer or Impatient Investor?

The producer repeatedly discusses time, money, and "real artists." Up to a point, his concerns are legitimate: production expenses, difficult casting decisions, and the commercially unsuccessful history of filmmaking pose genuine challenges. Yet he acts contrary to his own claims again and again. His proposal to cast the little girl's mother without an audition, his order that the director impersonate a dog, and his enthusiasm for continuing auditions after the director has been beaten by the priest reveal his managerial lack of restraint.

Nevertheless, the producer is not an unqualified villain. He defends Vidyāpati's cultural prestige, criticises the blind imitation of popular songs from elsewhere, and accepts a financial risk in order to make a film in his own language. This ambivalence gives the character vitality. The problem arises when an institution professes to protect art but fails in everyday practice to secure performers' autonomy, training, and physical safety: cultural commitment then risks becoming no more than a declaration.

6. Suśīlā: Popular Film Songs and Local Cultural Memory

Suśīlā, an aspirant to the heroine's role, refuses to accept a Maithili song appropriate to the scene and insists upon a popular Hindi film melody. The director argues for a local song and invokes the cultural importance of Vidyāpati. Suśīlā misconstrues even the name "Vidyāpati," and associates discussion of "culture" with her examination marks in the school subject of Sanskrit. This play upon the similarity of words quickly exposes an absence of cultural understanding.

A serious question is concealed here: does a regional film mean only the use of regional songs, or a coherent creative form drawing on local narratives, lived sensibilities, and the language of performance? The producer and director treat local tradition as indispensable; Suśīlā regards the popular market as decisive. The conflict is less simple than "tradition versus modernity." Adopting a new tune or style is not inherently an abandonment of culture. The difficulty begins when an actor insists upon imposing a ready-made cinematic formula before understanding the needs of a particular role.

7. The Hero: Excessive Imitation and Disputes over Control

A young man aspiring to play the hero joins Suśīlā's song without being invited. Asked by the producer who called him, he answers that the song drew him in. The actor wants to decide the song, location, and tune of the shooting sequence, even though his assigned part is that of an exemplary young devotee of Śiva. The

needs of the fictional character thus become distinct from the actor's personal ambition to become a "star."

The producer and director wish to protect the song's dramatic suitability; the young man regards imitation of a popular melody as success. Eventually he and Suśīlā walk out hand in hand, singing the popular song. The image offers a paired embodiment of cultural imitation. Still, the director's aesthetic standards are not beyond dispute: invoking the sanctity of tradition is not enough to establish the credibility of a modern cinematic narrative. The one-act play leaves this argument in the form of a confrontation rather than a resolution.

8. Casting the Villain: From Performance to Actual Violence

The candidate for the villain's part arrives with dialogue about smuggling, gold biscuits from abroad, and criminal gangs. The proposed film contains no such smuggling episode, but the candidate believes that a film cannot exist without fighting. The director outlines a short rural incident: a priest's son steals sugarcane or *latām*, and the hero prevents him. Here the local misdemeanour of social life is contrasted with the cinematic hyperbole of the popular crime spectacle.

When the candidate begins delivering his lines, the producer himself plays the adversary. In the name of acting, the young man starts throwing real punches; the director also receives a beating. The priest's episode is repeated with greater violence. At the end, the defeated producer and director flee the stage, while the aspiring villain continues offering his own "ideas." The reversal in which the "villain drives away the hero" supplies the play's most telling final laugh.

The audition: who is performing, and who directs?

9. "Maithils and Villains": The Ethical Limits of Self-Satire

At one point the producer jokingly treats "Maithil" and "villain" as synonymous. Such a thrust at his own community may evoke laughter on stage. It cannot, however, be accepted as a description of the character of all Maithils. It is the rhetorical exaggeration of a character, not a factual conclusion the critic may endorse. The joke demonstrates both the force and the risk of satire: collective self-criticism, severed from its context, may harden into a stereotypical allegation.

Once read with this ambivalence in view, the play's target is seen to be not simply "Maithil people" but the various opportunistic, unskilled, and self-absorbed attitudes arising in the name of Maithili art. Local talent may well exist within the community, yet the institutions required to identify and develop it have not matured. That is the underlying sorrow of the play.

10. Language, Song, and Scenic Coherence

The dialogue mixes Maithili, Hindi, and English vocabulary. Words such as "producer," "interview," "real artist," and "location" construct the working language of cinema; household names, village comparisons, and references to Vidyāpati establish the basis of a local artistic idiom. Language itself becomes an object of contest: the performers bring the conventions of the popular industry, while the director seeks the local register of his narrative.

The references to songs are not merely devices of aural entertainment. Recognition of popular film songs and the insistence upon Maithili music link one scene of conflict to the next. The playwright does not undertake a formal comparison of the songs' musical quality; rather, he questions their social position. How a vernacular film might assimilate its linguistic inheritance and how it might relate to the market's new visual culture become a debate made visible as stage comedy.

11. Scenic Construction and the Possibilities of Stage Performance

A table, a few chairs, papers, and an entrance suffice for the playwright to evoke the extensive setting of cinematic auditions. Each applicant arrives with distinctive gestures and objects. The little girl's flight with the biscuits, the priest's stick, Suśīlā's song, the hero's gestures, and the villain's punches create meanings through dramatic action that exceed mere entertainment. Such a staging scheme depends upon careful control of the timing of ensemble performance.

The one-act play has limitations as well. Some candidates' incompetence is deliberately exaggerated; the director's repeated beatings risk making humour dependent upon physical suffering. The female applicants are on several occasions confined to familiar patterns of appearance, dress, and popular dancing, with less attention paid to their professional promise. The producer and director's declarations about culture cannot themselves substitute for practical methods of training performers. These critical limitations should be acknowledged without overlooking the dramatic energy of the scenes.

12. The Institution of Casting: Transparency, Training, and the Question of "Real" Talent

The producer wants "real artists," yet his criteria become progressively more uncertain. At first he favours appearance, then the priest's social respectability, then popular song style, and finally the villain's frightening performance. No stable basis is established for asking which actor is suited to which role. Each applicant arrives with a familiar personal image of acting, while the producer and director repeatedly explain the script's requirements. The source of the irony is not simply individual stupidity but the absence of an organised selection procedure.

Amateur performers need tests that explain the imagined circumstances of a role. Age-appropriate instructions for the little girl, an explanation of the difference between a fictional character and an actual family for the priest, an account of the local narrative's meaning for hero and heroine, and training in safely simulated violence for the villain are conspicuously absent. The proposal for training does not negate the scenes in the primary text; it is a critical reflection upon an alternative way in which those scenes might have been organised. The play itself does not draw up such a plan, but visibly renders its absence comic.

Especially during the child's audition, the producer begins by judging her appearance. Suśīlā disagrees over the song tradition, yet the director cannot carry out a serious, safe, or orderly assessment of her artistic ability. Inequality in the evaluation of female performers must also be considered in these episodes. The priest and villain actually injure the director, but the child's inexperience and Suśīlā's preference for popular music likewise receive harsh adverse reactions of a different kind, exposing the institution's unstable decision-making procedures.

The failure of the dream of a Maithili film should therefore be blamed neither on the performers alone nor solely on the producer. The preparation of actors, the writer's subject matter, the director's artistic judgments, and the producer's financial management must be made mutually accountable. The substance of the satire lies in its demand for collective discipline, not in cultural self-congratulation.

13. Conclusion: The Promise of Regional Art and the Irony of Production Institutions

Maithili Film is not the story of a completed film production; within an unsuccessful experiment in casting, it reveals both the possibilities of local art and an institutional crisis. The producer has invested money, the director seeks narrative coherence, and the applicants bring ready-made models of prestige and popularity. Among these competing demands, art itself becomes uncertain. In the last scene, where the aspiring villain calls his acts of violence his own original "ideas," the future of an art supposedly being fashioned in the name of linguistic identity becomes an object of satire. The play's enduring question is that declaring love for one's language and culture is insufficient; that love must be transformed into training, transparent selection, professional dignity, and creative sensibility.

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PART III · MAITHILI MUSICAL DRAMATIC SKETCHES / LITERARY CRITICISM 6

6. Three Musical Dramatic Sketches

MUSICAL DRAMATIC CRITICISM | ONE

From the Bridegroom's Waiting to a Satire of the Marriage Market: Song-Dialogue and Social Meaning in Sabhāgāchhī

Abstract

Sabhāgāchhī is a musical dramatic sketch of modest compass in which the voices of a bridegroom, his father, an associate, and a marriage intermediary converge to disclose the economic and ethical contradictions of the marriage system. The agitation of a thirty-year-old man who has come in search of marriage for the fourth time, his father's preference for wealth, the associate's recurrent commentary, and the intermediary's eventual refusal together constitute not the story of a marriage accomplished but a brief dramatic composition about a failed negotiation. This study argues that the recurrence of song and the collision of character-voices are the chief structural instruments of social satire. The institutional context of the Saurath assembly is relevant to the cultural associations of Sabhāgāchhī; nevertheless, because the play does not expressly name Saurath, it would be improper to identify the two without qualification. The absence of a woman's voice, and the conversion of beauty and wealth into matters of bargaining from the bridegroom's side, are counted among the work's critical limitations.

Keywords: marriage market; Sabhāgāchhī; song-dialogue; Maithili satire; marriage intermediary; masculine perspective.

The Context of a Brief Theatrical Scene

The narrative thread of Lallan Prasad Thakur's Sabhāgāchhī is extremely slight, but brevity does not prevent its critical implications from extending beyond the immediate action. The comings and goings of a wedding procession, the arrival of a bride, and the completion of marriage rites are not its subject. Rather, it portrays the uncertain waiting of a prospective bridegroom and the transaction-centred behaviour of society confronted with the groom's family's extravagant expectations. Because the dialogue is sung, the action advances less through a proliferation of incidents than through the contest among voices and the continual return of the same expressions. Readers and spectators keep anticipating an outcome, but the final exchange leaves the situation once more suspended in waiting.

The title carries the cultural density of both sabhā, an assembly, and gāchhī, a grove. In Mithilā, the customary conception of the sabhāgāchhī has been connected with public negotiations over marriages, genealogical registers, the search for suitable partners, and mediation. Contemporary field studies describe the registrars of the Saurath assembly, the determination of marital alliances, and changes in social participation. Such external context, however, is not a literal identification of the play's specified stage location. The evidence furnished by the dramatic text itself consists only of exchanges among the bridegroom, father, associate, and intermediary. Maintaining this distinction safeguards the difference between the text and its cultural setting.

The suitor, his father, and the disputed marriage negotiation — an interpretive engraving.

The Waiting Bridegroom's Consciousness of Time

At the outset the bridegroom announces that this is his fourth attempt and that, should it fail, he is disposed not to return. Rather than a shortage of money, he blames his "fate"; his associate repeatedly sings this self-explanation back to him. Dramatic time is therefore constituted by the four journeys and the anxiety of being thirty years old. It is not merely a tally of waiting but the fear of slipping beyond social acceptability. Anxiety about passing the age considered suitable for marriage enters his voice in exaggerated form; the prospect of the wedding's fourth-night celebration repeatedly returns as a dream.

The bridegroom's self-pity is not entirely innocent from the beginning. At one moment he declares that differences involving the eyes, ears, or feet are immaterial to suitability for marriage. On one side, this resists his father's severe criteria; on the other, it suggests that deprivation and impatience lead him to treat the bride not as a person but as a vacancy requiring to be filled. The

desperate bridegroom's speech invites sympathy, yet within that sympathy the question of the woman's unrepresented personhood is suppressed.

The Father: The Language of Fate and the Calculation of Value

The father initially tries to calm his son's impatience by calling it a "game of fate." Behind this fatalistic language lies an unmistakable economic programme of his own. He wants the bride's household to provide money, prosperity, and enhanced standing; marriage becomes for him an opportunity for social prestige before it becomes a relationship. He places a constable, a wealthy father-in-law, a beautiful sister-in-law, an incapacitated mother-in-law, and a wife who will manage every domestic task on the same wish list. The internal contradiction is evident: while the son says he will accept marriage on almost any terms, his father makes wealth, beauty, and service its conditions.

In the father's imagination, wife, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and father-in-law are classified according to their allotted "functions." The bride promises domestic labour, the mother-in-law the convenience of reduced interference, the sister-in-law visual beauty, and the father-in-law a source of money. Disguised as humour, this vocabulary draws a harsh picture of the objectification of women within marriage. The mother-in-law's age or infirmity, rather than calling forth the family's moral responsibility, becomes in the father's eyes a favourable condition. The edge of satire lies in this perverted desire. Through the character's words, the playwright exposes a distorted masculine gaze to the audience, although he does not allow the women to answer it in their own voices.

The Associate's Echo: Dramatic Pressure within Song

The associate's principal task is not to introduce a new incident but to give an already spoken sentence a new rhythm and satirical implication. A recurrent reaction such as "But why has his fate turned out this way?" makes the audience laugh at the bridegroom's solitary distress even as it reveals the father's social blindness. The associate cannot, therefore, be adequately described as a merely consenting figure. His repetitions approximate the collective commentary of a singing ensemble.

Repetition can work in two ways on stage: first, it renders a character's private suffering recognizable to a community; second, whenever the word "fate" comes round again, the question of actual economic responsibility is deferred. Behind the screen of fate, both the rigidity of the father's choices and the system of transactions escape scrutiny. The refrain makes that evasion ridiculous. As the text prescribes neither a definite metre nor a specific musical setting, analysis of the song-dialogue must rest on the circulation of words and the structure of the characters' responses, rather than on an imagined score.

The Intermediary's Entrance: Bargaining Made Explicit

The entrance of the marriage intermediary marks the decisive turn of the play. The father attempts to stop or conceal him; the bridegroom sees another opportunity for marriage in his appearance. When the intermediary asks about educational qualifications, the prospective groom replies by reciting "A B C D" and "E F G H." This small linguistic arrangement produces satire out of the distance between actual educational attainment and the performance of naming letters. Neither the character's level of education nor any formal qualification can be established by that answer; the humour arises from the answer's inappropriateness to the question.

The intermediary's next inquiry concerns money. The father names fifty thousand; the intermediary calls the demand "very expensive." This brief exchange turns the discussion of marriage into an overt market transaction. The bridegroom then cries out about his age, his fate, and the prospect of the assembly dispersing. Far from settling an alliance, the intermediary departs. The dramatic outcome is thus not an agreed marriage, but a failure arising from the transaction itself and the social pressure attending it.

Social Criticism: The Absent Body of the Woman

In this musical sketch, written with remarkably few words, no individual woman's voice can be heard. Daughter, mother, mother-in-law, and sister-in-law are spoken about, but they do not speak upon the stage. That absence is itself a matter for criticism. Marriage becomes a problem debated within a patriarchal gathering, without directly confronting the woman's consent, education, preferences, or future. The bridegroom's despair and the father's avarice are not cast in quite the same light: the former shows the pain of social pressure, while the latter reveals a desire to profit from it.

Research into women's voices in Mithilā's marriage songs shows that the song tradition has also furnished women with means of satirizing and criticizing social institutions. Against this comparative background, a significant difference emerges between the male-voiced composition Sabhāgāchhī and the women's voices of the folk tradition. Hence, although the humour of Sabhāgāchhī succeeds, its critical reach does not fully pass beyond the bounds of patriarchal negotiation.

Possibilities of Performance and Limits of Composition

A dramatic structure of four voices is suited to an open or small performance space. The bridegroom's unstable agitation, the father's reassurances, the associate's sung comments, and the intermediary's bargaining call for four distinctly different tempos. A refrain might be delivered rapidly on its first occurrence, slowly on its second, and with pointed irony on its third. These are possibilities for performance, not claims that the original text specifies such a

melody. Nothing in the action establishes the need for elaborate scenery: the exchanges and responses of the voices carry the tension.

Nonetheless, in terms of dramatic action, the intermediary's refusal is the work's only decisive turning point. There is no inward change in the bridegroom, no self-criticism by the father, no protest from the bride, and no social resolution of the bargain. That absence may follow naturally from the composition's brevity, but a close reading must register it. Satire opens a question; it does not profess to supply an answer.

Conclusion

The importance of Sabhāgāchhī lies not in presenting a complete history of the marriage system, but in exposing the character of the marriage market through the contrary desires of father and son, the mediator's negotiation of price, and collective refrain. The bridegroom's impatience, the father's conditions, and the intermediary's refusal constitute a triangle that transforms humour into social criticism. The work's most consequential irony is that everyone speaks about marriage, yet the bride is granted no voice. This small experiment in Maithili musical drama derives its aesthetic force from intelligible repetition and the agility of colloquial exchange; its limitation resides in the absence of a woman's perspective.

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MUSICAL DRAMATIC CRITICISM | TWO

Dreams of Marriage, Disillusionment with the In-Laws' Household, and the Limits of Male Narration: Sung Self-Satire in Sāṛhūnāmā

Abstract

Sāṛhūnāmā is a lyrical self-narration by a single speaker. The hopes of happiness generated by newly married life, an idealized image of the in-laws' household, anticipation of the fourth night after the wedding, and the disillusionment that rapidly follows bring the romantic imagination of marriage into conflict with domestic reality. Direct address to a sāṛhū—a man related by marriage through the sisters who are their wives—makes the composition conversational, intimate, and suitable for performance. Yet its one-sided ridicule of the bodies, conduct, and dispositions of the mother-in-law and wife raises a further question: does the satire criticize masculine blame, or does it reproduce it? This essay compares the structure of sung narration, the reversal between beginning and end, the making of humour, the absence of women's speech, the ideal of the in-laws' home, and the critical traditions of folk song.

Keywords: sāṛhū; in-laws' household; solo sung narration; marital disillusionment; humour; representation of women.

A Theatrical Scene in a Single Voice

The generic distinction of Sāṛhūnāmā is that it contains no direct conversation among several characters of the kind found in Sabhāgāchhī. Addressing a sāṛhū, the speaker gradually discloses his experience after marriage. The text supplies neither an extensive cast list, stage arrangement, nor sequence of entrances. A listening figure is certainly imagined within the utterance, but he is not represented in the text as a person who replies. Dramatic force arises instead from changes in the speaker's perspective, oscillations of the self-addressing voice, and the continuing sense of questioning an interlocutor.

This form should not be dismissed as a mere song. The composition tells us that the first month of marriage brought excitement and expectation, after which the meaning of experience changed. The dream of the past and the grievance of the present contradict one another. The speaker becomes both the witness to his imagined happiness and the judge of its failure. Dramatic conflict here resides not between different characters but within a single speaking voice.

From Kailāsa to the Domestic Chamber: An Inversion of Metaphor

The song opens by associating the in-laws' home with the imagined Kailāsa. Relations with the mother- and father-in-law appear deeply respectful, and

within a month of marriage the new householder sees before him an expansive prospect of happiness. Cultural references to temple, mosque, and gurdwara serve here to evoke and compare the cheerful idealization of the in-laws' household; they should not be made into a theological conclusion. The opening tone suppresses the possibility that life in that household may yield contrary experiences.

As the song progresses, however, the newly married man declares that his initial expectation of happiness was an illusion. Instead of an extended, moonlike duration of delight, a single month has sufficed to turn expectancy into aversion. The house of the in-laws, initially imagined as Kailāsa, becomes the place he longs to leave. The physical place remains the same; its meaning alters. This opposition between the "ideal home of the in-laws" and the "difficult home of the in-laws" is the sung drama's most stable structural foundation.

The imagined abundance of marriage and the disillusioned speaker — an interpretive engraving.

Food, Festivity, and the Economics of Marriage

At first the speaker tries to describe love as "commerce" and constructs an image of assorted delicacies, the kohbar or nuptial chamber, the fourth night, erotic anticipation, and abundant enjoyment in the in-laws' home. Through these objects marriage becomes, alongside love, a festival of consumption. The hyperbole of "fifty-six" kinds of food, combined with the intensity of desire, generates humour. The ideal married life seems to be defined by the joint fulfilment of affection, beauty, food, and service.

Later all these objects disappear from the speaker's complaint: there is no moonlike wife, no flowerlike sister-in-law, no festive night, and no satisfaction in exceptional food. This inverse sequence enables the song to dismantle the

myth it has itself constructed. Yet the failed hopes also arise from the man's unrealistic expectations, which he presents as the faults of the household's women rather than acknowledging his own responsibility.

Humour's Second Edge: Hyperbole and Self-Mockery

Changes of rhythm, exaggeration, and sharp echoes of everyday speech take the place of an extended plot. Initially the speaker proclaims his good fortune; later he laments his "misfortune" in the same voice. The humour arising from this alteration of tone may lead listeners to laugh not only at the wife or in-laws but also at the speaker's implausible dreams. The change could be effected through collective singing or through a solo performer. These are possibilities for realization, not descriptions of a documented staging specified in the source.

When the speaker amplifies his account through extravagant sounds and expressions, the target of satire becomes uncertain. Is the laugh directed at the new wife, or at a man who expects excessive pleasure from marriage? This doubleness partly prevents the song from becoming merely a misogynistic tirade. Nevertheless, readers must keep their critical bearings clear: the failure of a man's romantic fantasy is not, in itself, evidence of a woman's culpability.

Images of the Female Body and the Absence of Women's Testimony

The initial seductive imagery includes descriptions such as "fair, fair cheeks" and "black, black hair," founded upon the conversion of women into objects of visual gratification. After the mood changes, the mother-in-law's eyes and the wife's facial expressions and behaviour become objects of mockery. Such bodily responses reproduce patriarchal norms of beauty almost reflexively. Although the subject of Sāṛhūnāmā is a husband's disillusionment after marriage, the wife's labour, voice, desire, and account of her own life among the in-laws remain unspoken.

Studies of women's folk songs in Mithilā show that women themselves have articulated critical positions on marriage, husbands, the in-laws' household, paternal kinship, and inequality within the family. Against that background, the force of expression in this masculine complaint is matched by its one-sidedness of hearing. Comparative reading shows that laughter is not automatically synonymous with resistance: its social meaning depends upon who is allowed to speak and who must remain silent.

The Social Dramaturgy of Addressing the Sāṛhū

The word sāṛhū is no mere ornament. It is a theatrical device for suggesting trust and shared experience. The speaker recounts his private disappointment to a male relation presumed capable of understanding the pleasures and trials of marriage. The presence of this imagined listener prevents the narration from hardening into a purely inward monologue; it takes the form of social conversation.

Although the sāṛhū's replies are not written into the play, repeated direct address sustains the possibility of a response.

The intimacy of a single speaker also has its limit. Experience of the domestic sphere is described exclusively between male companions; women cannot offer a counterstatement. This structure can enliven the unforced humour of a folk gathering, yet it also creates the difficulty of one-sided testimony. A literary assessment must recognize both consequences together.

Marriage as an Institution: From Celebration to Responsibility

In the song's first movement, the value of marriage is measured by pleasure and welcome. In its later movement emerge difficulties concerning food, domestic labour, emotional compatibility, and relations within the family. Beneath the satire lies a precise insight: household life is not a single night of celebration but a prolonged process of inconvenience, reciprocal conduct, economic work, and emotional adjustment. The speaker fails to understand that necessity and is therefore trapped between disappointment and accusation.

From this perspective it would be careless to read Sāṛhūnāmā as a categorical declaration against the institution of marriage. The text offers no universal proposition such as "marriage is always suffering"; it presents the reversal in one speaker's experience during a single month. The authorial satire may be directed chiefly against the unreality of marital fantasies, but that intention is opened to interpretation by the composition's polysemous voice.

Rhythm, Performance, and Critical Limitation

The song moves from an initially laudatory rhythm toward one that is at once plaintive and comic. A solo actor could make the transition effective through changes of pitch, pauses, facial expression, and direct engagement with the audience. The lines do not prescribe the visual materials of a particular production; a possible performance should therefore not be mistaken for an attested historical staging.

The principal limitation remains that the married woman's account is wholly absent and the husband's disappointment expresses itself in descriptions or ridicule of women's appearance. Although the possibility of self-mockery allows the audience some distance from his accusations, the work's engagement with the position of women remains restricted. It is the responsibility of a critical reader to distinguish the pleasure of folk humour from social prejudice concerning gender.

Conclusion

The distinctiveness of Sāṛhūnāmā lies not in the number of dramatic events but in transformations within speech itself: hope into aversion, praise into complaint, confidence into embarrassment. Address to the sāṛhū lends the

utterance a social character; images of food, beauty, and ritual delineate the unrealistic dream of marriage; the short passage of time breaks that dream. The work is an effective instance of male-voiced folk satire, whose strength must be considered together with a critique of the missing female voice and the bias informing its ridicule.

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MUSICAL DRAMATIC CRITICISM | THREE

The Bargain over "Twenty-Five Thousand" and the Invaluable Labour of Motherhood: Matrimonial Mediation and the Satire of Value in Ghaṭkaitī

Abstract

Ghaṭkaitī opens with a negotiation over money between a father and a marriage intermediary. The progression from five to ten, twenty, and twenty-five thousand converts marriage into market bargaining. The father enumerates the costs of his son's schooling, upbringing, medical treatment, and his mother's suffering; the intermediary reverses the argument, asking the father to include the bodily labour and suffering of motherhood in the reckoning of his own birth. This incisive reversal produces the musical sketch's central ethical recognition: to regard the life of a child as a financial investment is already to place humanity itself in question. The essay examines the rising movement of the exchanges, numerical recurrence, the father's justification of dowry, the intermediary's rebuttal, the absence of women's speech, and theatrical economy. No marriage is definitively arranged by the conclusion: calling the negotiation "big business," the intermediary withdraws.

Keywords: Ghaṭkaitī; dowry; bargaining; motherhood; matrimonial mediation; dialogic satire.

A Dramatic Opening Constructed from Sums of Money

In the first four exchanges of Ghaṭkaitī, the action seems to be built entirely out of a sequence of cash values. The intermediary proposes five thousand and the father refuses; after ten and twenty thousand, the father gives a qualified assent at twenty-five thousand. This rapid escalation involves neither a delayed introduction of characters nor a lengthy account of the setting. The whole conflict of the scene appears compressed into increases in the sum, but the conversation subsequently begins to question the ethical grounds upon which money is calculated.

The recurrence of numbers thus becomes, in one sense, a metre of performance. Numerical progression recalls the familiar speech of the marketplace for an audience listening to the play. The list of amounts is not information offered by ordinary narration; it displays a relation of power between two persons. As the demand rises, the relations involving son, daughter, and families become increasingly objectified. In this sense the musical quality of the sketch need not reside exclusively in extended verse: it can also emerge from the rhythmic give-and-take of spoken dialogue.

The Father: Education, Employment, and the Capitalization of Marriage

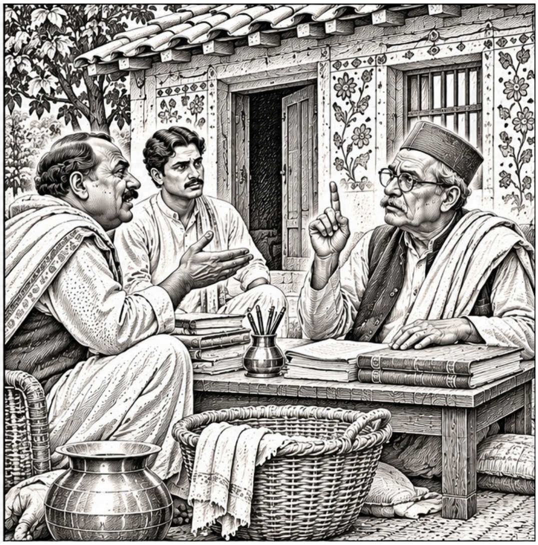
The father connects his son's having passed the matriculation examination, and the possibility of further education, with the conditions of marriage. He hopes that the father-in-law will support future study, secure employment for the young man, and, out of affection for his daughter, open new economic opportunities. In this reasoning marriage is not a partnership between two equal persons; it is a project of advancement for the bridegroom's family. Although the son's present educational attainment is modest, a price is demanded on the basis of conjectures about his future.

The father's affectionate address, "like my dear boy," is also the language of emotional ownership. The son's actual abilities, labour, and human character are not discussed; the supposed merit of having brought him into the world becomes the grounds of a claim to repayment. The father's tentative agreement at twenty-five thousand does not in itself constitute a final decision that a wedding will take place: the intermediary's ensuing challenge destabilizes the bargain. To conclude that "the marriage has been settled" would contradict the evidence of the text.

The Intermediary's Counterargument: "Why Are You Conducting Such a Great Business?"

The intermediary himself initially raises the offered amount and therefore does not enter the discussion as a disinterested moral instructor. Yet when the father's greed increases, he asks what tiger was slain simply by begetting a son. The question punctures the father's claim to an act of exceptional beneficence. The intermediary warns him that the bride's family, too, may have suffered its own hidden pain and that the mere act of fathering a child grants no unlimited entitlement to money.

The sharpest counterstroke comes when the father itemizes the costs of raising his son. The intermediary replies that the father ought also to add up his own mother's bodily labour and suffering in giving birth to him; he will then discover the impossibility of assigning a monetary price to human relations. Poetically, this return of the language of "accounts" is exact: the person who turns life into an object of bookkeeping cannot even fully reckon the invaluable labour through which he himself came into being.



A marriage intermediary contests the father's accounting of human life — an interpretive engraving.

Maternal Suffering and Invisible Domestic Labour

The father invokes expenditures on hospitals, milk, teachers, books, exercise books, and sweets. The list certainly names material costs involved in education and upbringing. He nevertheless treats those costs as an automatic justification for receiving money in return when his son marries. The intermediary's final response raises the question of the suffering endured by the father's own mother. Motherhood appears here not merely as unpaid service but as labour that challenges the very terms of economic accounting.

A second level of criticism is nevertheless essential. Both men refer to a mother's body and labour, but neither the mother herself nor the prospective bride speaks. Women's experience becomes a premise within a debate between men, not an autonomous narrative offered by a woman. This limitation does not annul the satire's effect, but it cautions against treating the piece as an entirely realized feminist resistance. Motherhood may possess a value greater than monetary wealth, yet the language of that invaluability must not confine a woman to maternal affection as her sole social role. That question emerges from the margins of the play.

Vernacular Speech, Aphoristic Dialogue, and Verbal Pace

The language of Ghaṭkaitī renders its social perception immediately accessible. Short transactional sounds such as "five thousand," "no," and "ten thousand" establish a quick rhythm on stage. Later the father elaborates his reasoning at length, and the intermediary's replies gradually grow in scope as well. Through

this irregular movement the composition advances from the initial banter and jest toward a serious ethical rebuttal.

Concrete images drawn from experience—the hospital bill, school fees, the price of milk, a mother's pain—prevent the satire from becoming merely an abstract sermon. These are tangible elements of living. A reader can therefore reject the father's illegitimate conclusion without denying the real difficulties of bringing up a child. The composition's strength lies in making clear the distinction between actual expenditure and the incongruous repayment of that expenditure through dowry.

The Form of the Critique of Dowry and Its Social Contradictions

The musical sketch offers no lengthy theological exposition of the word dowry. The bargaining is itself a social sign: one party sets a sum for the groom and the intermediary for the other party raises the offer. Birth, education, and prospective employment are added to the marital price. The playwright's attack on this arrangement comes not through a slogan of indignation but through the progressive reversal of an argument. The market price of marriage is revealed to be not natural but a claim to power constructed within relationships.

Field research on the familial and social history of the Saurath assembly has emphasized the historical functions of genealogical registrars and marriage intermediaries in the marriage practices of Mithilā. The intermediary of Ghaṭkaitī may be regarded as a dramatic representation related to that larger tradition, but he is a satirical character, not the directly documented life of a historical marriage broker. The playwright turns a culturally familiar term into a pointed theatrical instrument.

The Failure of Bargaining and the Open Ending

At the close, the intermediary professes himself unequal to such an enormous business negotiation and withdraws with a farewell. This abrupt departure preserves the work's critical effect. The dramatic question remains with the audience afterwards: when a person fixes a price for marriage, whose value is actually being assessed—that of the son, the daughter, or the negotiator's own prestige?

Nothing in the original text says that the marriage takes place, that twenty-five thousand is paid, or that the father repents. The work concludes with a reasoned resistance, not with a practical settlement. The brevity of the form does not yield a complete programme of social change; its purpose is to break apart the logic of a defective belief.

The Woman's Perspective and Comparative Satire

Both Sabhāgāchhī and Ghaṭkaitī strike at the economics of marital negotiations. In the former, however, the father demands fifty thousand for his

son and the intermediary departs because of the excessive condition; in the latter, the offer rises to twenty-five thousand and the intermediary himself advances an ethical objection. The distinction shows that the same marriage market can be satirized through two different dramatic designs.

In neither piece does the bride speak directly, a limitation shared by both. Comparison with existing studies of social criticism in Maithili women's songs reveals that popular marriage traditions were not confined to negotiations among groom, intermediary, and father: the bride's family and women's voices embodied different forms of social experience. The point of comparison is not to dismiss Ghaṭkaitī, but to register its absences while acknowledging its effective satire conducted through exchanges between men.

Theatrical Meaning and Concluding Assessment

A composition with only two characters could be rendered effectively through vocal pace, distance, facial expression, and pauses. A short hesitation from the intermediary at every new sum, and alterations in the father's tone, could make the economic tension visible. This is a possibility of production, however, not the history of a staging recorded in the dramatic text. The central dramatic climax is the final counterargument concerning "a mother's suffering," after which the moral balance shifts.

Ghaṭkaitī sets the petty arithmetic of marital commerce against the incalculability of motherhood and human relations. The father regards education and upbringing as capital and demands a price; the intermediary turns the same language of "accounts" against him and demonstrates the incoherence of his reasoning. This brief musical dramatic sketch constitutes a sharp vernacular satire of dowry. Its question remains pertinent to contemporary readers: where human worth is measured by financial advantage, how can the ethical foundation of relationships be preserved?

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7. Thirteen Songs and Lullabies

The Maithili Songs and Lullabies of Lallan Prasad Thakur: Independent Literary Studies of Thirteen Compositions

Song, Voice, Craft, Labour, Linguistic Identity, and Social Criticism

The songs-and-lullabies section of the collection contains thirteen compositions. They are not of one kind: there is a collective pledge for linguistic rights, a lullaby addressed to a child, a scene of rice harvesting, and songs of separation, festivity, domestic satire, and the lyrical emotions of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Each composition is read separately in terms of its speaker, voice, refrain, imagery, repetition, and social questions.

A songlike style and a relation to folk culture, though interconnected, are not identical. Authored songs recorded in this collection have not automatically been treated as anonymous traditional folk songs in the absence of historical and musical evidence. External theoretical writings on folksong are employed only to clarify generic comparison, sound, and social context; the evidence for each interpretation remains the individual original song.

INDEPENDENT STUDY 01 | Saṅkalp Liya

The Collective Voice of Linguistic Identity: The Public Song, Appeal, and Historical Consciousness of Saṅkalp Liya

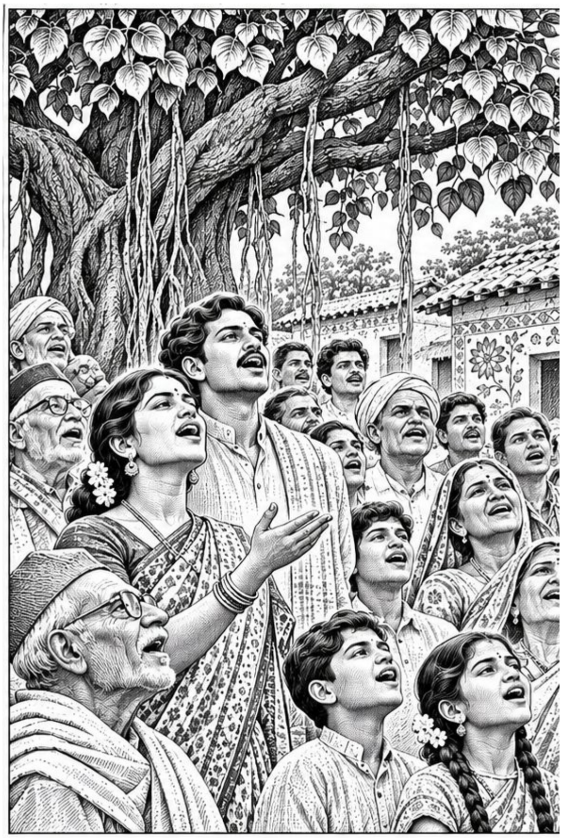
Abstract

Saṅkalp Liya casts the question of Maithili's public rights into the collective address of song. Its repeatedly renewed "pledge" is not merely an emotional proclamation; it becomes an ethical discipline of collective mobilisation. The song's voice changes across four registers: "peaceful effort," the demand for official recognition, direct address to political leaders, and a warning that the struggle will intensify. Its historical linguistic demand must be distinguished from the language's present constitutional status.

Keywords: language movement; collective address; public song; pledge; historical context.

The Recurrence of the Pledge and the Song's "We"

In this composition the lyricist passes beyond the boundaries of private happiness and suffering to constitute language as a public concern. "We shall speak Maithili" and "We shall live for Mithilā" combine to make linguistic development a matter both of everyday speech and of a collective conception of life. The refrain "Take the pledge" could elicit responses in an assembly or collective singing; the original text, however, provides no particular melody, vocal arrangement, or account of a historical occasion. Its potential for performance cannot therefore be mistaken for evidence that a specific performance took place.



Collective song of language rights.

The Sequence of Appeal, Government, and Resistance

The opening declaration of peaceful endeavour becomes a more forceful political appeal in the later lines. The direct addresses to the "leaders of the country" and to "Indiraji" introduce an immediate relationship between citizen and state. The demand for a place in official records, letters, and lists seeks not merely cultural pride but institutional recognition. The poet does not make opposition violent at the outset: there is first an appeal to listen and see, and only then a declaration that the struggle will grow if the demand goes unheard. The song thus moves from naming a deprivation to demanding political responsibility.

The Historical Demand and the Caution of Retrospection

The composition records a demand that Maithili be placed in the Eighth Schedule. Maithili was subsequently included in that Schedule in 2004; for the contemporary reader, the song can accordingly also become a cultural document of the struggle preceding an attained right. Yet it would exceed the evidence to

treat the publication date of the collection as the date of the song's composition, or to claim that it belonged to a particular meeting in an official campaign. Preserving this historical distinction brings its collective resistance into sharper focus.

Artistic Achievement and Limitation

The song's force lies not in elaborate pictorial ornament but in simple imperative verbs, repetition, and the construction of a public "we." To render the complex question of language policy in four or five familiar emotional signals is an accessible artistic procedure. At the same time, multilingual citizenship, social class, women's participation, and concrete institutional measures for linguistic rights receive no extended discussion. This limitation may be understood within the aims of a short public song, but it must nevertheless be identified by criticism.

Conclusion

Saṅkalp Liya makes Maithili not merely a language of conversation but an obligation of public identity. Situated on the boundary between slogan and song, the composition lends singable energy to the history of linguistic rights. Its aesthetic value inheres in verbal economy, repeated exhortation, and the ordered tension between peace and struggle.

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INDEPENDENT STUDY 02 | Tore Lel Analahu Hāthī Ghoṛā

A Future in the Arms of Sleep: The Lullaby Imagination of Tore Lel Analahu Hāthī Ghoṛā

Abstract

This lullaby makes a future world for the child through an interplay of affectionate sound, familial attachment, mythological narrative, education, and an imagined nation. The rhythms of "cham-chham," Queen Sleep, the Moon-Uncle, grandmother's stories, and the tricolour widen the imaginative setting from the intimate lap to public ideals. Alongside its tenderness, the song also raises the question of excessively ambitious expectations projected onto a child's future.

Keywords: lullaby; childhood imagination; lap; national consciousness; onomatopoeia.

The Advent of Sleep and the Gentleness of Voice

The first requirement of a composition sung to put a child to sleep is not conceptual complexity but vocal rhythm and reassurance. Sound clusters such as "cham cham" and "chham chham" create a play of hearing; "Queen Sleep" turns an abstract condition into a familiar and affectionate presence. Elephants, horses, dolls, and little bridal figures open up the child's world of toys. Within this domestic space tenderness takes the place of command, and delight the place of instruction.

Grandmother and child in the moonlit lullaby.

The Family Circle and Narrative Memory

The moon as maternal uncle, the grandmother, and her lap together make family more than a network of blood relations: it becomes an institution for transmitting stories. Grandmother tells the immortal story of Rāma, so that the ancient narrative comes to the child's future through affection rather than as a school lesson. References to Sītā, Rāma, and Lakṣmaṇa function both as images and as ideals. In the lullaby's world the distant sky, the domestic lap, and the mythic past are present together.

Education, Advancement, and Public Aspiration

The future-oriented passage beginning with "will read and write" wishes for the child's education, advancement, and the spreading of the country's name. The presence of Nehru, Gandhi, and the tricolour connects private love with national expectation. This is a significant movement: the lullaby concerns not only sleep, but also the social order imagined for the next generation. Yet criticism must

recognise that the child's own interests are as yet unknown; the singer's wishes are placed before the child as ideals for the future.

Gender, Address, and Artistic Limitation

The repeated addresses "bauā," "son," and "darling boy" unmistakably speak to a male child. An equivalent dream for a daughter is absent, although this does not diminish the fundamental human worth of the song's tenderness. Nor would the text alone justify determining the gender of the person who sings: the affectionate voice might belong to anyone. The song does not claim a comprehensive representation of familial cooperation; it constructs a specific sphere of love directed towards two sons.

Conclusion

Tore Lel Analahu Hāthī Ghoṛā beautifully brings together the fundamental singability of the lullaby and a set of social aspirations. Its movement of imagery from the lap of sleep to the sky of the tricolour enlarges its scope. The affectionate tension between private parental love and collective expectations of the future is its literary substance.

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INDEPENDENT STUDY 03 | Lālmuniyā

Rice in Agahan and the Song of Love: Labour, Season, and Metaphoric Correspondence in Lālmuniyā

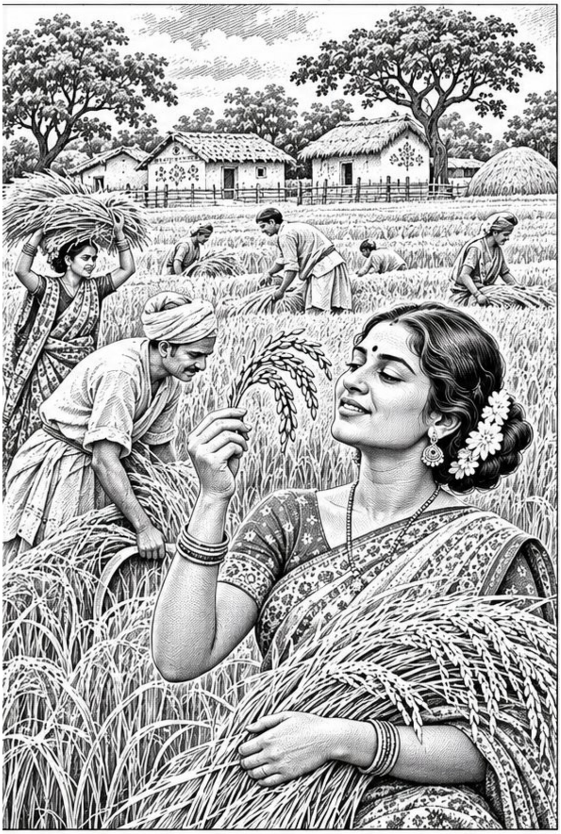
Abstract

Lālmuniyā transforms a scene of ripening rice in the month of Agahan into the language of amorous address, workers' lives, and rural festivity. Ears of rice, labourers and cultivators, anklets, sari and lehenga, and earrings form a chain of meanings. The luxuriant natural world of the song is beautiful, but within it one may also discern the fatigue of agricultural workers and the implications of women's labour in the harvest.

Keywords: Agahan; rice harvesting; agricultural season; love song; labour.

The Social Time of the Season

The phrase "the reign of Agahan" signals the agricultural background of the lyric. Personifying the rice as wedding guests, members of a procession, and participants in a ceremony transforms the ripening crop into a social event. The field is not merely the ground of production; it becomes a stage for metaphorical action. Green-and-gold rice and the image of dancing on the village path evoke the shared movements of rural life. A particular moment in the agricultural year is transformed into an emotional season.



Rice harvest in Agahan.

The Presence of Workers and Cultivators

The mention of "workers and cultivators" amid the colours of an abundant rice harvest prevents the song from becoming an exclusively erotic text. There is labour behind the green fields, and the ear of rice is labour's result. The song does not, however, discuss wages, landownership, or unequal shares of the crop in detail. Recognising this limitation, one can say that labour is an actual element in the construction of the scene, not a fully elaborated narrative of class conflict.

The Beloved's Adornment and the Thing Harvested

The lover promises to make an earring for the beloved while urging her to cut ears of rice. The proximity of the word bālī, meaning both an ear of grain and a woman's earring, is the lyric's ingenious metaphorical centre. The crop's economic value becomes an ornament of beauty. Alongside a promised gift of love comes an expectation of women's agricultural work; the latent tension

between these two meanings distinguishes the song from conventional descriptions of beauty.

Sound, Scent, and Dance

Onomatopoeic expressions such as "jhunan jhunan" and "damdam" intensify audible movement. Saris and lehengas, anklets, fragrance, and the dancing of the village produce a combined sensory richness. The written text cannot establish a definitive rhythm or melody, but its recurrence and short verbal units are oriented towards dance-like presentation. This emulation of folk forms is more accurately read as the structure of an individual authored song.

Conclusion

Lālmuniyā is a song of the reciprocal exchanges among season, love, and agricultural labour. Its achievement is to connect the ear of rice with the emotional life of the people; its limitation is that the material questions of workers remain obscured by its festive voice.

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INDEPENDENT STUDY 04 | Chhuk Chhuk Chhuk Chhuk

The Rhythm of the Train and the Child's Gaze: A Social World in Motion in Chhuk Chhuk

Abstract

Written for children, Chhuk Chhuk presents the motion of a train through playful utterance, passengers of varied kinds, and images of the railway station. The engine, whistle, green flag, fair-like crowd, and fruit sellers provide the song's visual foundation. The names of different linguistic communities quicken its movement, but its use of stereotyped speech patterns also calls for critical examination.

Keywords: children's song; railway; onomatopoeia; multilingualism; social imagery.

The Construction of a Scene through Sound

Six successive utterances of "chhuk chhuk" establish a rhythm like the movement of railway wheels. The "poo-poo" sound, the whistle, the guard's green flag, and the moving carriage become aural equivalents of experiences familiar to a child. The writer does not merely instruct the child, but invites the child into song through the sound of a moving object. The composition therefore lends itself naturally to enactment and clapping as well as to singing and listening.

The Station: A Temporary Society

Jostling, confusion, and the fair-like crowd at the station make the journey both a celebration and a disorder. Cries advertising apples, pomegranates, and bananas turn the train into a mobile market. The significance of this world, rarely noticed in children's verse, is that the child sees a social environment different from the familiar home. Literary experience expands the limits of place; as the engine moves, the child's gaze moves forward as well.

Linguistic Diversity and Stereotyped Sounds

The song marks the identities of Madrasi, Bengali, Punjabi, and Maithil speakers through familiar imitations of speech. For a child, these may offer an entertaining introduction to the existence of different linguistic styles. Yet reducing diverse communities to one or two imitative words may also strengthen stereotypes. The distinction matters to literary criticism: a device that causes laughter is not necessarily an instance of respectful cultural representation.

An Interrogative Ending and Childhood Curiosity

A social observation akin to “everyone thinks himself a guru” enters the final passage. This is not merely information about a train but a small satire on human conduct. The song begins with the sound of machinery and ends by raising a question about social behaviour. That turn may overburden a young child’s understanding; sung with an adult, however, the line could also provide an opening for dialogue.

Conclusion

Chhuk Chhuk’s principal achievement is to make language into a moving scene. The imitation of the train, the image of the station, and the diversity of social encounters enliven it; its critical limitation lies in the compressed stereotyping of linguistic identities.

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INDEPENDENT STUDY 05 | Bītal Din Sab Mon Paṛaiyā

Broken Dreams and Clouds of Separation: The Voice of Memory in Bītal Din Sab Mon Paṛaiyā

Abstract

This song speaks of separation through memories of an absent beloved, unfulfilled promises, and seasonal imagery. Anklets, storm clouds, peacocks, and water-laden skies register the changing states of the mind. Throughout the composition, the recurrent "my mind finds no rest" concentrates the refrain: separation is not merely the absence of union but the repeated return of past scenes into the present.

Keywords: separation; memory; anklets; season; recurrence.

The Return of the Past

The title binds departed days to present mental pain. The remembrance of "days gone by" is not a period of time sinking into oblivion but an active experience repeatedly startling the mind. With "the dream I had was broken," the speaker apprehends the distance between promise and deprivation. The refrain does not advance an event; it reiterates the same suffering through different images. The composition thus has a circular structure of feeling rather than a plot-driven sequence.

The Images of Anklets, Clouds, and Peacock

Heavy clouds, the "chham-chham" of anklets, and the movements of peacocks connect with vivid memories of the beloved. Nature first appears illuminated by the opportunity of companionship; subsequently the absence of those scenes creates a profound inner void. The written text does not disclose a fixed melody, but the onomatopoeia of anklets transforms human footsteps into the music of love. The sound of an object becomes an emotional sign—an important poetic resource of folk rhythm.

The Ethical Significance of the Promise

A pledge such as "we shall spend our lives together" takes love beyond a passing attraction. The song invokes the hostility of an "enemy world," but does not specify the actual social form of that opposition. Which power broke the relationship—caste, class, marriage, or family? The text does not say. Rather than invent a particular cause, criticism must recognise that the song experiences social obstruction as an unnamed antagonism.

The Question of Gender in Memory

The singing voice tells of its suffering, but whether the poetic speaker is a man or a woman cannot be established from the text alone. Assigning a gender to the beloved or declaring a cause of separation would constrict the emotional openness of the lyric. Its indeterminacy gives it a broad potential for reception. At the same time, it leaves the concrete social form of the character's struggle in the background.

Conclusion

The strength of Bītal Din Sab Mon Paṛaiyā lies in the recurring exhalation of memory and its delicate use of natural and audible imagery. The song does not analyse separation; it gives a voice to its continually returning moment.

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INDEPENDENT STUDY 06 | He Re Chandā

Speaking to a Migrant Beloved through the Moon: Women's Separation in He Re Chandā

Abstract

In He Re Chandā, the moon becomes an intermediary asked to carry a message to the beloved who has gone away. In one song the speaker expresses her isolation, forgotten promises, the self-description "his servant," and the grief of her lover's departure abroad. The familiar tradition of separation is apparent, but the song's creative energy derives from direct personal address and the moon's light, at once present and absent.

Keywords: moon; women's separation; migration; message; waiting.

The Choice of an Impossible Messenger

To make the moon a messenger is an ancient poetic convention. Here the direct cry "O moon!" gives the speaker's solitude a dialogic form. The beloved is distant and communication impossible, so a shared object in the sky becomes an intermediary. The "dark night," and the moon's rising or failure to rise, enact the rhythms of hope and despair. No answer arrives from this messenger: the song's drama is created by address on one side alone.

Social Isolation and Distress

The poetic speaker says that no one understands her anguish and no one brings news of the beloved. The line signifies not only private heartbreak but also a failure of social communication. Calling herself "his servant" introduces a cultural grammar of deferential surrender into the relationship. This submission gives emotional intensity to the song, yet also discloses a tendency to make a woman's independent desire depend upon the beloved's recognition.

"Maheś" and the Unresolved Meaning of Elsewhere

The poem contains a line resembling "Why are you offended, Maheś?" Without other evidence, it is inappropriate to identify Maheś definitively as a deity, the personal name of the beloved, or a historical individual. Within the lyric one can establish only that the beloved's presence is invoked through the address. "Away from home" and "abroad" convey the experience of migration, but the country, occupation, duration, and material causes of the departure are not supplied by the text.

Recurrence and the Erosion of Patience

The repeated call to “Chandā” returns continually to the same feeling. With phrases such as “no patience remains” and “all I wished for was this much,” the ordinary desire to live with the beloved becomes an enduring sorrow. The song asks for no extravagant worldly gift, only the minimum expectation of companionship. Pathos grows out of the contrast between this modest desire and disproportionate suffering. The moon renders the song pictorial and singable, but offers no sign of resolution.

Conclusion

He Re Chandā draws upon the cultural language of separation to create an explicitly woman-voiced emotional world. Its achievement is to express intense solitude through a simple messenger-metaphor; its limitation is to leave the social causes of the beloved’s absence undefined.

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INDEPENDENT STUDY 07 | Dil Dhaṛkal Āṅkhi Pharkal

The Comic Language of Domestic Anxiety: The Unequal Marital Perspective of Dil Dhaṛkal Āṅkhi Pharkal

Abstract

This satirical song transforms a husband-speaker's panic at the news of his wife's return into comic exaggeration. Watery potato dal, daily visits to hotels and cinemas, the husband carrying bags, and the wife imagined in the form of Durgā produce a one-sided male account of power in the household. Its governing mode is humour, but that humour is no equitable representation of the complexities of actual family relationships; criticism therefore begins with the absent voice of the woman.

Keywords: marital humour; male speaker; domestic labour; exaggeration; gender representation.

Dramatic Panic Brought on by the News

The opening line evokes a racing heart and a twitching eye. The information that the wife will arrive by the morning train opens a complete scene of apprehension in the husband-speaker's mind. The arrival of a loved one might ordinarily be an auspicious occasion; here it is inverted into a crisis. This reversal contains the seed of the comedy. Repeated use of "from tomorrow" makes the anxiety of the coming day perceptible already in the present.

Food and the Imagery of Domestic Work

Dal as thin as potato water, scorched bread, and the responsibility of holding the child in one's lap are all the materials of everyday household labour. The male speaker sees himself becoming a "servant" at home. The critical question is whose responsibility that work actually was, and how it was divided while the wife was absent. The song offers no balanced account; it presents only the husband-narrator's exaggerated experience. Criticism cannot treat his assertions as evidence of women's situation as a whole.

Durgā and the Metaphor of Fear before Power

To call the wife "Deviji" and then perceive her in the "form of Durgā" produces a satirical reversal. An image of sacred feminine power becomes an occasion for laughter at domestic fear. Complaints about her praise of her natal home or neglect of gifts reach the listener not in the wife's own voice but through the husband's imagined retelling. Consequently, the wife becomes a symbol of

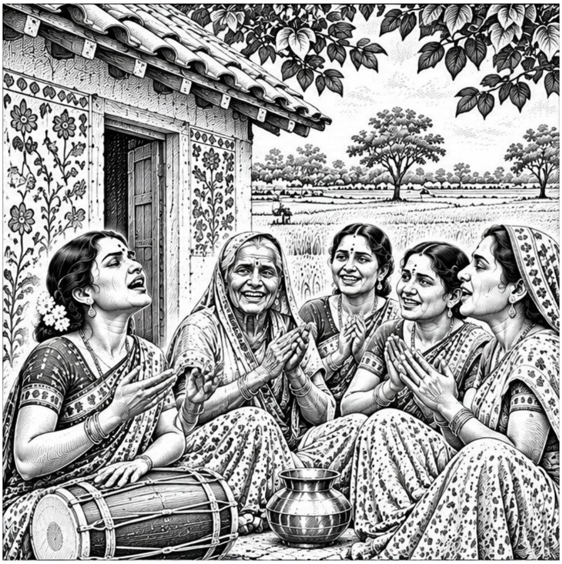
apprehension rather than an individual character. To understand the humour is also to recognise this gendered limit of representation.

Modern Amusement versus the Home

The hotel and cinema signify independent leisure in the song; the wife's presence at home brings, in their place, the image of discipline and responsibility. This is the convenience-centred perspective of the male speaker. The text is silent on whether the wife herself seeks leisure, entertainment, or rest from work. Because its voice is one-sided, the song remains centred on humour rather than becoming a debate over mutual domestic obligations.

Conclusion

The effect of Dil Dhaṛkal Āṅkhi Pharkal arises from effortless colloquial exaggeration and the reversal occasioned by news of an arrival. The absence of the woman's actual voice is its major critical limitation, one that any analysis of the humour must acknowledge.



Women singing in a domestic gathering.

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INDEPENDENT STUDY 08 | Ahāṅ Hamar Ke Chhī

The Praise of Love and the Possessive Gaze: An Inquiry into Beauty in Ahāṅ Hamar Ke Chhī

Abstract

Ahāṅ Hamar Ke Chhī is a song of amorous praise, bodily description, and an appeal for union. The cuckoo, moonlike face, black sari, kajal, and bee invoke a traditional poetic vocabulary of the beloved's beauty. Yet the lover's gaze is unilateral, and the closing line makes union conditional upon the beloved's acceptance. The tension between these two tendencies is the centre of the study.

Keywords: love song; beauty; masculine gaze; assent; metaphor.

The Dramatic Force of an Interrogative Title

"Who are you to me?" is not simply a declaration of closeness; it asks for a definition of the relationship. By returning repeatedly to that question, the composition suggests a desire for dialogue, but the beloved is given no independent line in which to respond. Even while questioning, the speaker supplies his own answers through phrases such as "queen of my dreams" and "mad with love." The conflict expresses both the emergence of feeling and a desire to name the relationship unilaterally.

Metaphors of Nature and the Body

The cuckoo's fifth note, the moonlike face, silver, a black sari, and a bee situate the beloved within an extensive symbolic network of nature and erotic adornment. Kajal-darkened eyes and the radiance of the body create an experience dominated by vision. The reference to "sixteen springs" is a cultural sign of youth; it should not be treated as documentary evidence of an actual age within a social relationship. The imagery, however, attends more to bodily appearance than to the beloved's personality.

Emotional Intensity and the Risk of Objectification

Expressions such as "the bee of love" and "the nectar of the body" make love manifest as physical attraction. These are familiar devices of the erotic tradition, but criticism cannot stop at the beauty of their ornamentation. The extent to which the beloved's decisions, feelings, and preferences become visible is a necessary question. Her voice remains offstage while the speaker's gaze is active throughout. The inequality also limits the song's emotional world.

An Indication of Consent within the Appeal

In the final passage "let the two of us become one" is accompanied by a condition akin to "if you accept what I say." The line makes room for the possibility of consent, though the song supplies no explicit answer. The lover's direct appeal for union forms a moment of social dialogue; criticism cannot speak of union as already accomplished. Here the open ending acquires artistic significance.

Conclusion

Ahāṅ Hamar Ke Chhī is a melodious love song of metaphor and address. Its artistic attraction lies in reiterated sound and images of beauty; its critical limitation lies in the dominance of the speaker's possessive gaze over the beloved's voice.

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INDEPENDENT STUDY 09 | Sab Elay Phaguāme Sajanā

A Solitary Courtyard amid the Crowds of Phaguā: Marital Separation in Sab Elay Phaguāme Sajanā

Abstract

The collective delight of the Phaguā festival and the empty courtyard of a solitary newly married woman form a stark opposition in this song. Its central incidents are the husband studying on the fourth night after the wedding, his departure at dawn, the absence of letters and messages, and the grief that he did not even leave a photograph. The question of a woman's emotional abandonment arises amid modern aspirations for education and marriage.

Keywords: Phaguā; newly married woman; separation; education; courtyard.

Communal Festivity and Private Emptiness

The opening "everyone has returned" recalls the homecomings and colour-filled community of Phaguā. Yet "without you my courtyard is empty" makes public joy the sharp backdrop to private separation. The lyric opposition opens several artistic possibilities: noise and festivity surround the woman, while silence occupies the centre. The singing speaker conveys her condition not through unmediated emotional lament but by contrasting it with the presence of everyone else.

The Fourth Night and the Longed-for Intimacy

The fourth night of marriage is a significant cultural marker of a new conjugal relationship. The song says that the husband continued to study even that night and departed in the morning. This brief scene creates an uneasy distance between education and marital responsibility. To blame study itself is not the author's argument; the question is why the newly married woman's equal emotional rights are neglected in the pursuit of advancement. The song protests against disconnection and irresponsibility, not against education.

The Absence of Letters, News, and a Photograph

The sequence of lacks—"not even a letter," "not even news," and "not even a photograph"—asks for the most elementary material support for memory. In the absence of means of communication, even the absent beloved's face must be entrusted to recollection alone. The modest scale of these demands shows that the woman's pain concerns not luxury but recognition within the relationship. A letter or photograph could have provided an emotional presence in the form of an object; their absence deepens separation.

The Village as a Field of Social Comparison

The mention of Lal Kākī's twin sons and a feast compares personal waiting with the village's communal celebration of reproduction. Here social pressure towards motherhood becomes an implication deeper than the explicit words; this comparison alone, however, cannot prove that the lyric speaker necessarily wishes to become a mother. The song presents the different pace of the woman's time and her husband's life elsewhere.

Conclusion

The achievement of Sab Elay Phaguāme Sajanā is to bring a woman's personal loneliness into focus amid the crowds of a festival. The partly frustrated beginning of married life and the lack of communication give the song its social significance.

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INDEPENDENT STUDY 10 | Madhur Madhur Bājay Bāṅsuriyā Re

Attraction and Amorous Sulking to the Music of Rādhā and Kānha: The Singable Līlā of Madhur Madhur Bājay Bāṅsuriyā Re

Abstract

This song briefly presents Kṛṣṇa's flute, the dance of the gopīs, Rādhā's attraction, and the piqued feeling that calls the flute a "co-wife." Repetition produces a dance-like flow, while personifying the flute produces the divided emotions of attraction and jealousy in love. The composition carries a devotional colouring but is internally a lyrical reinvention of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's amorous play.

Keywords: Kṛṣṇa song; Rādhā; flute; amorous sulking; rāsa.

Sound as the Dramatic Centre

The entire world of the lyric is centred on the sound of the flute. The repetition of "madhur madhur," or "sweetly, sweetly," in the opening refrain makes the pleasure of listening present in the very act of utterance. The dancing gopīs and Kānha's melody gather around a single source of sound. There is neither a long narrative nor a succession of changing incidents; the effect of a melody not actually supplied is produced through verbal recurrence, indications of dance, and the emotional states of the characters.

The Duality of the Flute in Rādhā's Mind

Rādhā is captivated by the flute, yet understands the same instrument as her "co-wife." What connects her to the beloved through its sound also enters into rivalry with her for his affection. The word sautiniyā gives the sulking emotion of devotional eroticism an accessible vernacular form. The song's essential imaginative achievement lies in this personification: the flute is no longer merely an instrument but a third presence in a triangle of love.

The Shape of Folk Tradition and an Authored Composition

Classifications of Maithili folksong refer to gopī-related cowherd songs, rāsa, and the emotion of māna, or amorous displeasure; this song enters into dialogue with that cultural horizon. But those classifications cannot automatically establish that the cited composition is a traditional anonymous folksong. It is a collected work by a known author whose verbal craft incorporates materials of folk singing. It is more defensible to identify thematic resonances than to assert a mechanical equivalence among different traditions.

Women's Feeling and Narrative Brevity

Rādhā experiences both enchantment and displeasure, but the song gives her no extended speech of her own. The gopīs' dancing constitutes a collective scene; the development of individual consciousness remains limited. The song allows for a performance combining dance and singing, but the original text prescribes neither specific choreography nor instrumentation. Such theatrical interpretation therefore remains a possibility, not evidence of a documented performance.

Conclusion

The literary importance of Madhur Madhur Bājay Bāṅsuriyā Re lies in making the flute the centre of both attraction and jealousy. Concise singability and cultural familiarity are its strengths; the limited unfolding of the emotional situation is the constraint of its brief form.

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INDEPENDENT STUDY 11 | Haiyā Re ... Haiyā Re ...

River, Sāvan, and Separation in a Boatman's Song: The Moving World of Love in Haiyā Re

Abstract

Haiyā Re combines the boatman's cry, river water, the wind of Sāvan, anklets and ghunghrū bells, and the separation of love. The "boatman" is not merely the name of an occupation but a potential helper who can carry the speaker towards the beloved. The repeated "haiyā re" may echo a rhythm of collective work, but neither a definite boat song melody nor an actual communal labour performance can be inferred from the written text.

Keywords: boatman's song; river; Sāvan; separation; work rhythm.

The Audible Movement of "Haiyā"

"Haiyā re" is at once a call and a rhythmic cue. Its repetition evokes the bodily rhythm of rowing a boat. The song constructs movement through images such as "the waves have risen," "the wind has begun to blow," and "the water of the river." Instead of a static picture, the world is continuously flowing, swaying, and advancing. The lyric's singable structure resembles the movements of water; it would, however, be groundless to conclude that the scene records an actual boat journey.

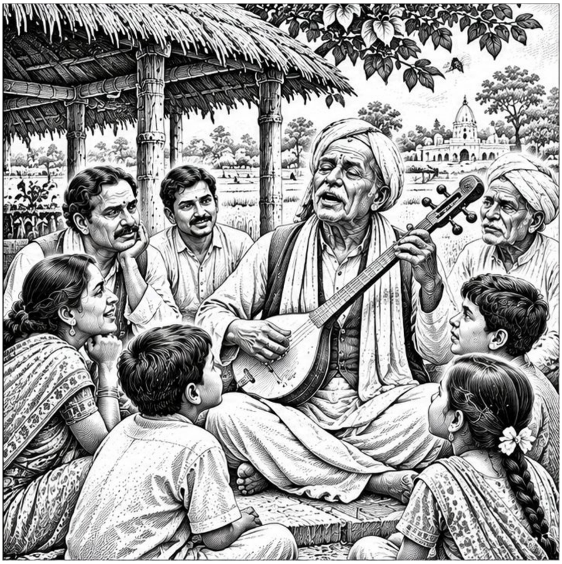
The Colours of Sāvan and the Memory of the Body

The peacock, Sāvan, tinkling bells, and anklets bring music and nature into a single experience. The season's colours stir the touch of love in the speaker's mind. Transforming signs of labour into erotic feeling, the song connects the urge to cross the river with a personal longing for union. Here Sāvan is more than a season: it is the affective time in which the relationship intensifies.

The Appeal to the Boatman for Passage

With an expression such as "where is peace without my beloved?" comes an appeal to the boatman to carry the speaker into the land of love. The possible crossing may be understood geographically or metaphorically; no particular place or distance is specified. The boatman becomes an intermediary capable of ending the traveller's separation. The movement of the boat and the void of absence are organised within one system of imagery.

Labour and the Tradition of Folksong



Generations listening to a village singer.

The song's sound resembles the experience of collective work songs associated with agriculture or boats. Folk studies assign importance to performance, occasion, and the singing community in determining genre. Here it is appropriate to acknowledge the textual designation "boatman's song," without claiming an historically demonstrated inheritance from a particular boatmen's tradition. In a composition hospitable to folk rhythm, the voices of labour and love meet.

Conclusion

The achievement of Haiyā Re is to make an action-bearing cry singable by joining it to the symbols of river and Sāvan. The song embraces both the pulse of work and the feelings of separation, but an independent social investigation of occupational realities is not its aim.

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INDEPENDENT STUDY 12 | Gor Gor Gor Sab Chhai Gor

The Family Circle of Humour: Kinship and Colour Consciousness in Gor Gor Gor Sab Chhai Gor

Abstract

Centred on a child, Gor Gor Gor Sab Chhai Gor makes playful fun of maternal uncles and aunts and maternal grandparents. Recurring rhyming words such as gor, chor, and ghor turn the affectionate domestic world of the lullaby into laughter. Alongside the intimacy of this humour, the text invites questions about fair skin as a standard of beauty and the conventional representation of different family members.

Keywords: children's humour; kinship; rhyme; colour consciousness; lullaby.

A Play of Sounds and the Entertainment of the Child

The title repeats gor three times. Before conveying an extended meaning, the lyric offers a game of verbal music: rhymes moving from gor to chor and ghor produce memorable sounds well suited to children's ears. Its full effect is thus to be imagined not solely within written sentences but through the pace of utterance, inflections of voice, and laughter in the family. Since the source specifies no tune, this remains an account of possible performance.

Maternal Aunt and Uncle: Teasing within Affection

The aunt's lips, the uncle's dance, and jokes at the uncle's expense break the formality of kinship. To the child, maternal uncles and aunts become participants in joking rather than distant social positions. The image of "one step forward and one step back" is a miniature scene for enactment. Yet the aunt is not given a reply of her own, so the teasing may also be one-sided. Criticism must ask which forms of humour are reciprocal and which are directed at someone who does not answer.

Maternal Grandparents and the World of Food

Curd and flattened rice, the grandmother and grandfather, and their arrival connect the song with food and familiar family activities. Grandmother's tears and the attempt to soothe the child introduce an affectionate atmosphere. In one line the grandfather is the object of a joke involving food; in another the grandmother is a source of emotional shelter. Through such shifts the song does not stabilise into a plot, but moves forward by making brief scenes of one family member after another.

The Appraisal of Colour and Appearance

The enthusiastic recurrence of gor also reflects a tendency to take the positive value assigned to fair colouring for granted. It is impossible to establish precisely the point of comparison or the actual complexion of a particular character here; nevertheless, the question of colour prejudice in standards of beauty is critically relevant. Repeated laughter in children's compositions can also normalise social representations. To ignore this second meaning would leave the social study of the song incomplete.

Conclusion

Gor Gor Gor Sab Chhai Gor turns family kinship into a play of sound and miniature enactment. Its significance rests in memorable rhymes and domestic intimacy, but its colour consciousness and the limits of one-sided teasing are equally worthy of consideration.

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INDEPENDENT STUDY 13 | Mon Ne Lāgay Ahāṅ Binā

From Rewriting to Rejoinder: The Dialogic Turn of Mon Ne Lāgay Ahāṅ Binā

Abstract

This composition shares its refrain and many images with the preceding Bītal Din Sab Mon Paṛaiyā, but adds in its later passages an invitation to become "life companions" and a young woman's explicit reply. Her voice, her objection to a very considerable difference in age, and her right to reject the proposal transform this version from an ordinary lyric of separation into a dialogic social satire. Both likeness and difference between the texts are grounds for criticism.

Keywords: repetition; intertextuality; consent; age difference; dialogic song.

The Echo of the Earlier Song

The opening of this song returns to the memory, cloud and anklet imagery, and "my heart finds no rest" of Bītal Din Sab Mon Paṛaiyā. These likenesses establish a textual connection between the two compositions. The dramatist, however, now uses the earlier condition of separation for a new social turn. Both works stand as separate entries in the collection; it would be inappropriate to treat one silently as a mistake in, or a missing passage from, the other and to conflate them.

The Melody of Proposal and the Arrival of Another Voice

An appeal resembling "come and be my life companion" creates the prospect of a scene of union. It is followed by an unequivocal answer from the "girl." This change is decisive: emotion formerly contained within a single singer now encounters another person's reply. The narrator's experience loses its presumed universal authority; a declaration of love can no longer be mistaken for permission to enter a relationship.

The Age Difference and the Ethics of Refusal

The young woman contrasts her sixteen years with the suitor's thirty-six and explicitly tells him not to entertain hope. These ages belong to the dramatic content of the song; they offer no evidence of an incident in the author's life. Their significance lies in the young woman's expression of her own wish and refusal. A retort akin to "wash your hands before you ask for mine" joins resistance with light humour, but beneath the joke consent and the boundaries of relationships remain serious questions.

The Social Sting of Colloquial Humour

The song first adopts the tender emotional style of separation, then introduces sharp blows of brief dialogue. Humour is not merely a diversion: it becomes a way of expressing the inappropriateness of unilateral courtship. The young woman's voice changes the conventionally passive beloved into a character who can decide. Her social circumstances are not described at length, but the moment in which she defines her own boundary is unmistakable.

Conclusion

Mon Ne Lāgay Ahāṅ Binā is a notable instance of intertextuality within the collection. After the recurrence of the earlier verses of separation, the young woman's refusal gives the song a new ethical significance: expressing emotion is a right within love, but it cannot replace another person's consent.

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8. Hindi Writings

HINDI LITERARY CRITICISM / 01 / PLAY 1: SŪNĪ SAṚAK

The Deserted Road and the Voice of Resistance: Power, Memory, and the Tragic Drama of Justice in Lallan Prasad Thakur's Sūnī Saṛak

Abstract

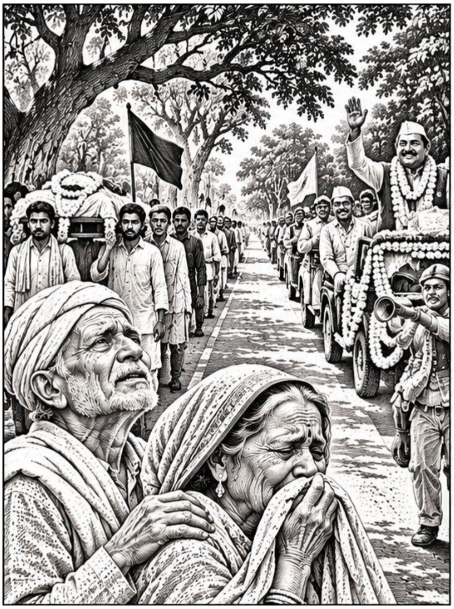
Sūnī Saṛak is a multilayered drama of political repression, resistance by educated unemployed youth, institutional partiality within the police and administration, and familial tragedy. At first the road is a site of public life, memories of the freedom struggle, and democratic participation; the murder of Jai and the persistence of terror transform it into a deserted territory of fear. Across nine scenes, the differing roles of Jai, Ghanshyam, Prem, Murli, Rai Virendra Singh, Jai's parents, and the police give concrete form to social injustice. Political speeches, baton charges, arson, attempts to purchase consent with money, a custodial killing, confusion over a toy revolver, revenge, and final self-destruction are interwoven within a single plot. This study closely examines the arrangement of scenes, ethical conflict, women's agency, the legitimacy of violence, the theatrical use of shadow, and the symbolic epilogue. Alongside the play's intense consciousness of resistance, it questions the limitations of its revenge-driven resolution.

Keywords

Maithili–Hindi playwriting; political drama; Sūnī Saṛak; Jai; police power; public space; revenge; theatrical symbolism; women's agency.

1. The Road: From Setting to Political Character

The play opens not with the physical presence of a protagonist but with a description of a road. A voice-over associates it with the heat of the sun, the coolness of the moon, and the journeys of travellers, calling it a 'wedded' public place, alive with human association. The immediate question is how a road full of life can become deserted. From the outset the road therefore ceases to be a mere backdrop and becomes the drama's principal bearer of meaning. In our society, the road signifies everyone's right to move freely; its desertion represents fear in collective life and the destruction of communal trust. The first scene of the original dramatic text establishes this symbol through police movement, slogans, baton charges, stampedes, and the entry of wounded young people.



Opposing processions on a public road.

The playwright makes a physical place a witness to memory. Jai's father was associated with the independence struggle; he inaugurated this road and arranged for people to plant trees along it. The trees and the public thoroughfare connect the younger generation to the past. Sitting beside the road, Jai draws strength for his struggle. When murder and terror lead travellers to take another route, what is actually destroyed is not the road but citizens' confidence. The 'emptiness' of the title is thus more than geographical silence: it is the seizure of democracy's public space.

2. Jai's Idealism and the Material Difficulties of the Movement

Jai's friend Ghanshyam asks how long the movement can continue amid baton charges, constant running about, and limited resources. Jai regards commitment, truth, and honesty as sufficient instruments of struggle. His answer declares moral courage, but Ghanshyam's question subjects it to a practical test. A movement also requires organisation, safety, financial resources, and public confidence. Their disagreement contains the drama's most significant ideological tension: moral insistence against the actual asymmetry of structures of power. Simply calling Ghanshyam cowardly and Jai fearless would conceal this complexity.

Prem's role differs again. In anger he resorts to abuse and is drawn towards violent retaliation, whereas Jai favours discipline and public argument. The three young men do not speak with a single voice; their differences place disagreements within a political movement onstage. Yet the dramatic text does not develop an organised resolution of those differences. Under adverse

conditions Jai's resolve becomes an individual moral achievement, while the basis of a broader struggle gradually weakens. The seeds of tragedy lie partly in this inability.

3. Murli: A Victim Who Collaborates with a Criminal Order

Murli comes onto the road, intoxicated, to paste up posters. He depends economically on Rai Virendra Singh's network; the reference to abuse suffered by his own daughter connects opposition to that power with personal injury. He knows the local leader is in the wrong, yet earning a livelihood compels him to publicise that leader's cause. Through this character the play moves beyond the simple opposition of 'good people' and 'bad people'. An exploited person may also become a worker within the very exploitative system he condemns.

Murli's drunken entrance could have furnished easy comedy, but his confession turns that comedy into an account of social compulsion. Posters, a ladder, and paste are ordinary implements of a propaganda apparatus. Bringing them onto the stage shows that political dominance is produced not through a leader's speeches alone but through small wages, advertising, and everyday dependencies. This image gives the play's social realism a material foundation.

4. Rai Virendra Singh: The Mask of Public Service

Rai Virendra Singh proclaims himself a social worker and a devotee of nonviolence, yet attempts to suppress opponents through his violent associate Bhim. In an election speech he inadvertently calls citizens his 'subjects', then returns to democratic vocabulary when challenged. By citing his father's service in the freedom struggle, he deploys inherited prestige to shield present wrongdoing. In this character, power carries the language of public morality and the pursuit of private advantage at once.

The scene in which Jai is taken aside and tempted with office and money is particularly important. A commissionership, introductions to prominent leaders, cash, and promises of a secure future show how political dissent is bought off. Jai refuses, making the conflict one of public integrity rather than merely private goodness. Nonetheless, rendering Rai an almost all-pervasive criminal sharpens the satire while leaving less room for internal differences within institutions of power. The later honest inspector partially disrupts this rigidity.

5. Custodial Killing and the Two Processions

The assault on Jai by thugs, his arrest by the police, and his death in custody constitute the drama's decisive turning point. Political repression here means not merely silencing slogans but destroying the body of a promising young man. Jai's death is presented less as the immediate depiction of a violent act than through its public reverberations. The relations between police, criminals, and political protectors become progressively clear.

The fifth scene employs an inventive theatrical conception: Rai Virendra Singh's victory procession and Jai's funeral procession become visible at the same time. A division of lighting displays two opposed social truths: power sings its own praises as the bier of democratic hope is carried away. This juxtaposition is more incisive than a long speech would be. Parallel stage images allow the audience intellectual space to judge; in this sense the play seeks to show social contradiction, not merely report it.

6. The Father, the Toy Revolver, and the Political Meaning of 'Madness'

His son's death profoundly unsettles Jai's elderly father. His repeated 'I'll shoot you', cries of 'Har Har Gange', and toy revolver may seem comic or frightening from the outside. The thugs mistake it for a real weapon and recoil, whereas the police recognise the truth of the toy. The inequality of knowledge generates both tension and tragic irony. An object that is not genuinely dangerous exposes the reality of social crime.

It would be inappropriate to derive a definitive psychiatric diagnosis from the father's condition: the text constructs him as a theatrical image of grief, helplessness, and repetition. Dismissing his voice as that of a 'madman' also becomes a technique of institutional power. The police report, journalistic sensationalism, and the political official's insults create conflicting meanings. The man whose life has been ruined becomes an accused person; the speech of those whose power caused the injury becomes the measure of legality.

7. The Honest Inspector and the Limits of the Institution

In the final sequence the inspector tells a senior officer that Jai was killed in police custody and that the matter was suppressed to protect violent political leaders. The play therefore does not portray the police as an absolutely homogeneous corrupt body. One person summons the courage to tell the truth from within, but is threatened with suspension and decides to resign. The existence of individual integrity and the absence of institutional accountability are present simultaneously.

The difficulty with this scene is that the plot moves rapidly towards revenge before the legal consequences of the inspector's disclosure can develop. The audience consequently never sees how judicial procedure might actually be repaired. The heroism of individual resignation and the romantic attraction of resistance from outside institutions become internal tendencies of the drama. They are both achievement and limitation: the author shows resistance to repressive orders, but opens fewer concrete paths towards reconstructing democratic accountability.

8. The Mother's Revenge: Suffering, Decision, and Ethical Disquiet

Jai's mother enters the final scene carrying a real revolver. Initially a worried mother, she now becomes an agent of armed resistance. She reveals that she has been hiding in the bushes night after night to protect her husband, has fired upon the criminals, and finally trains her weapon on Rai Virendra Singh. The transformation prevents the female character from being reduced to an emblem of weeping. The injured mother directly questions authority: what moral legitimacy can attach to a law changed day after day to suit those in power?

Yet the drama's hardest question arises precisely here. The mother kills Rai, then shoots her husband and herself. To celebrate this ending merely as a righteous victory would be contrary to the play's tragic meaning. Revenge against a criminal may momentarily break the grip of fear, but replacing civic law with private violence cannot establish a durable system of social justice. The mother's autonomy signifies both the capacity to resist and the tragic foreclosure of social possibility. The work draws the audience emotionally towards her, while critical judgment must still question this cycle of violence.

9. Levels of Language and Stage Presentation

The play's language is predominantly Hindi, incorporating English expressions, administrative vocabulary, abusive colloquialisms, popular religious exclamations, and political slogans. Rai Virendra Singh's speeches and Bhim's obedience form a satirical pair; Jai's argumentative voice is more disciplined; Murli's broken utterances register the pressure of sorrow. The father's repetitions become part of the deserted road's soundscape. Language here marks class, relations of power, and states of mind.

The stage directions notably employ shadow, alternating light, processions, cover afforded by bushes, a toy pistol, and the sudden sound of gunfire. Within the constraints of a small stage, the same road becomes a living town, a site of repression, a square of mourning, and the ground of a final social pledge. The rapid changes of scene are powerful; nevertheless, repeated shootings and a chain of reprisals carry the action towards melodrama rather than theatrical realism. Recognising that mixture is essential to assessing the play's value.

Conclusion

The tragedy of Sūnī Saṛak lies not only in Jai's death but in the social death of a public place filled with memories of freedom. Murli's compulsion, Jai's determination, differences among his friends, Rai's mask, the inspector's resistance to his own institution, and the mother's revenge disclose different levels of a single society. The final appeal that the road might become 'wedded' to life once again expresses a desire to restore public life within a narrative of violence. The play's strength lies in its visual confrontation between public memory and repression; its limitation lies in the ethical difficulty of replacing

justice with private vengeance. Read with both edges intact, it becomes a deeply unsettling experience of political theatre.

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HINDI LITERARY CRITICISM / 02 / PLAY 2: ḌAM ḌAM ḌIGĀ ḌIGĀ

The Roar of Unemployment and the Defeat of Education: Class, Language, and Moral Disintegration in Ḍam Ḍam Ḍigā Ḍigā

Abstract

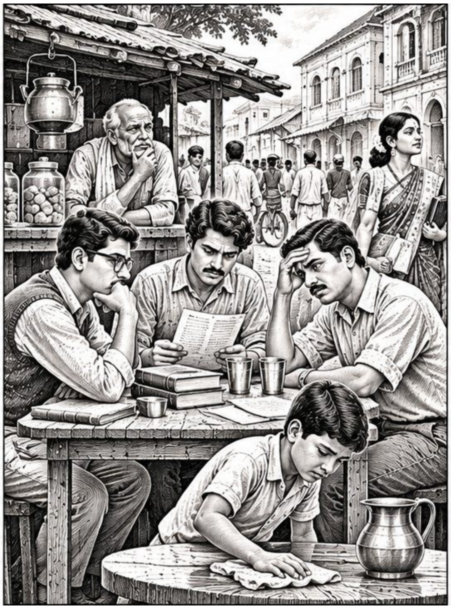
At the centre of Lallan Prasad Thakur's Ḍam Ḍam Ḍigā Ḍigā is a small hotel owned by Talwari Lal and served by the child assistant Manmaya. Three highly educated but unemployed young men—Lakshmipati Singh, Khushamad Singh, and Firauthi Lal—take refuge there. Under the pressure of poverty, two begin committing crimes and the third announces his intention to pursue kidnapping for ransom; meanwhile the prospects of Krishna, another educated examination candidate, and the more privileged life of Meera reveal different distributions of social opportunity. Across four scenes, comedy, rhymed exchanges, dialogic barbs, and the final image of tearing up books construct the inequalities of the employment market. This essay analyses the hotel as a social space, the satire inherent in names, education and the capital of English, the class position of the female character, the moral discomfort of crime, performance language, and the open ending.

Keywords

Unemployment; educated youth; Ḍam Ḍam Ḍigā Ḍigā; hotel; competitive examinations; English; class; satire; crime; theatre.

1. The Hotel: A Public but Dependent World

The first scene of Ḍam Ḍam Ḍigā Ḍigā opens in a small tea-and-snack hotel. Talwari Lal prays to Lakshmi for customers and income and repeatedly orders Manmaya to work; instead of a throng of paying customers he finds unemployed young men sitting about. The hotel is simultaneously a private business and an unofficial public shelter. From this contradiction springs the comedy: the lives of the young men depend upon the proprietor's livelihood, yet their presence is itself helping to bring his establishment to a standstill.



Educated unemployed men at a small hotel.

The onomatopoeic title sounds almost like a dance refrain, but the world beneath it is not one of cheerful dancing: it is a world of failed educational expectations and social exhaustion. What initially suggests a light tune gradually becomes the mask of a cutting irony. Talwari Lal's appeal to divinity coexists with his business troubles; economic uncertainty adopts the idiom of religious hope.

2. The Three Young Men's Names and Their Irony

Lakshmipati, literally a possessor of wealth, is penniless; Khushamad Singh, whose name evokes flattery, struggles with humiliation; the satirical name Firauthi Lal already bears the shadow of ransom and crime. These names are more than entertaining verbal inventions: they disclose the contradiction between identity and social circumstance. All three had dreamed of success in prestigious examinations but found themselves caught in rickshaw-pulling, precarious work, and unemployment. The work questions the mismatch between intellectual accomplishment and recruitment practices.

When Lakshmipati admits to pulling a rickshaw by day and robbing a traveller at knifepoint by night, laughter suddenly becomes anxiety. Khushamad turns to the transport of illicit goods. Talwari Lal is terrified by these admissions, yet sympathy for their hunger prevents him from abandoning them. The relationship between unemployment and crime is a question for social criticism; it does not make crime either an inevitable outcome or an innocent act. Both the characters' desperation and the rights of the unknown people harmed by their conduct must remain in view.

3. Manmaya: Child Labour and the Other Side of Comedy

Manmaya is an underage assistant. Ordered simultaneously to serve tea, sweep, and wipe tables, he questions the commands, endures insults, and nevertheless indicates that his labour has a price. Talwari Lal's dependence is evident: unless the stipulated small amount is paid, Manmaya will leave. The crisis of child labour thus stands quietly beside the crisis of educated unemployment. In a hotel whose livelihood is almost suspended, the wages of the child doing its daily work are also uncertain.

The boy's hybrid colloquial speech produces theatrical comedy; to treat it merely as a counterfeit 'Bombay-style' performance, however, would obscure its social reality. He possesses practical knowledge of his routine: one order at a time, provision for meals, and the expectation of pay. Unlike the three adults looking back on their education, Manmaya lives within the immediate transactions of labour. The playwright's stage brings these unequal social worlds together within a single small hotel.

4. Meera: Class Assurance and the Troubling Representation of a Woman

Meera is an educated young woman from an influential administrative family. Her English-inflected speech, references to her father's position, and easy confidence about competitive examinations sharpen the social inequality confronting the unemployed young men. Meera trusts the security of her class, while the three men answer what they perceive as her arrogance with ridicule. Class tension is clear in this confrontation, but that does not automatically justify their degrading behaviour towards a woman.

At times Meera fails to recognise the young men's human difficulties, yet she also asks why poverty should confer permission for rudeness or violence. This objection matters critically. The satire becomes most interesting when a character on the opposing side is not wholly wrong. Meera is not merely a caricature of pride: she can be read as an unstable conjunction of class privilege and moral discernment.

5. English, Clothing, and the Hidden Capital of Examinations

The three young men criticise the importance attached in recruitment to fluency in English, expensive coaching, smart clothing, metropolitan manners, and prestigious family backgrounds. Their charges cannot be separated from their characters' experience and declared universal statistical facts. Yet the dramatic truth of their experience is clear: examinations do not take place in a social vacuum free of economic inequality. Besides books and knowledge, forms of self-presentation, linguistic polish, and access to social networks also matter.

Krishna Kumar provides an important counterpoint. He is preparing for another interview and suffering from failure, but does not inevitably choose criminality

as the unemployed trio do. Under the guise of warning him, the three spread despair. The play here tests the distance between social resistance and self-destruction. Its question is not merely 'Why did they fail to find employment?' but also 'How does a human being sustain a moral vocabulary when social failure becomes permanent?'

6. Talwari Lal's Affection: Labour, Fatherhood, and Economic Irony

The elderly proprietor repeatedly sees that the young men are costing him money, yet cannot turn them out. His conduct is guided less by commercial calculation than by human affection. They call him uncle; the relationship is built not on blood but on living together through difficult times. This created kinship provides support in the dehumanising circumstances of unemployment.

His kindness, however, also produces an ethical dilemma. There is the danger of accepting the proceeds of crime in the hope of improving the hotel. Does the old man's compassion give the youths a chance to reform, or conceal the consequences of their offences? The reader can recognise both possibilities. The fantasy of a 'five-star hotel' is an ironic hope; the notion that a sudden bundle of cash can erase a real lack of resources becomes part of the play's own satire.

7. The Final Scene: The Theatre of Tearing Books

At the end of the fourth scene, Krishna's preparation and Meera's possible assistance generate a new conflict. The three youths laugh while tearing up educational notes and books; a voice-over refers to the crying concealed within their loud laughter. Destroying books is not simply an attack on objects but a symbolic revolt, born of despair, against the system of knowledge that attracted them with promises and offered them no reward.

That revolt also demands criticism. Books do not belong solely to a particular class; they can be instruments of self-education and social change. The youths' rage is understandable, but destroying the material means of knowledge is no solution. The final voice-over asks about the new bonds left behind after colonial bondage was broken. The play thereby exposes the distinction between two propositions: 'The nation is independent' and 'Its young people enjoy equal opportunities.'

8. Stage Language, Laughter, and Limitations

The unity of the hotel setting intensifies the play's presence. Religious invocations, demands for food, Manmaya's running about, Firauthi's rhymes, Meera's English, and Talwari Lal's affection produce distinct social registers on the same stage. Satirical momentum often comes from verbal reversals and quick replies. Through four scenes, the force of laughter gradually gives way under the pressure of economic despair and social anger.

A limitation may arise from excessive sympathy for the three young men. The possible victims of their crimes, the woman's independent viewpoint, and Manmaya's longer-term future receive relatively little development. The play condemns class injustice; its most useful lesson is to keep open the question of why individual wrongdoing and structural injustice cannot be made to cancel one another within a single moral proposition.

Conclusion

The hotel in Ḍam Ḍam Ḍigā Ḍigā is a miniature society of small-scale commerce and unequal opportunity. The educated youths' names become ironies, the old proprietor's generosity a last refuge, the child assistant's work the hotel's invisible foundation, and Meera and Krishna bearers of different experiences of social competition. The destruction of books at the end is a fierce symbol of social failure, but not a remedy. The play matters because it recognises the human unease concealed within the employment crisis and turns laughter into a question.

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HINDI LITERARY CRITICISM / 03 / ONE-ACT PLAY 1: SAHYOG

The Principles of Safety and the Insecurity of Life: The Domestic–Industrial Conflict in Sahyog

Abstract

The one-act play Sahyog constructs a poignant contrast between the ideal of industrial safety awareness and discordant conduct within a family. Manohar Lal, a foreman, advocates safety, discipline, and collective responsibility at work, but his relationships with his wife Rita, son Raj, friend Singh, elderly father-in-law, and fellow employees are strained. The play begins with a safety song on a household tape recorder and ends with music in the home after an industrial accident. The text contains overlapping questions of modernity and domestic autonomy, adolescent love, male control, the lack of safety equipment at work, superstition, the pursuit of promotion, and collective irresponsibility. Its central critical proposition is that the ideal of 'cooperation' must be tested not in individual sermons but in social action and behaviour.

Keywords

One-act play; cooperation; industrial safety; foreman; domestic authority; collective responsibility; helmet; tragic irony.

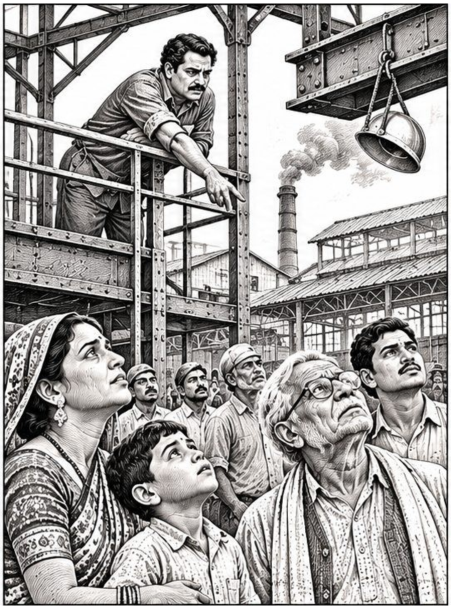
1. The Opening Song: The Play's Promise and Its Irony

The one-act play begins with a safety song playing on a tape recorder and projected images introducing the characters. The song declares the necessity of safety at home, in the workplace, outside, and in the country; it asks for the cooperation of father, wife, son, and friend. Thus the play first makes the audience hear its entire ethical vocabulary. Yet as soon as the action begins it becomes clear that the song's professed ideal and the conduct of the household have parted company. Dramatic force lies in that distance, not in the novelty of a lecture about safety.

For Manohar Lal, safety is not merely an industrial regulation: it concerns the reciprocal claims of family, society, and nation upon life. He explains to his friend Singh that faith in destiny cannot replace individual duty. An internal question nevertheless arises within this argument: how inclusive is the ideal of familial 'cooperation' proposed by someone who cannot find the time to listen, decide on equal terms, or remain emotionally present at home? The structure of the scenes, whether deliberately or inadvertently, gathers this question into the play.

2. Manohar Lal: Devotion to Duty and Blindness to Himself

Manohar Lal is dedicated to his job and does not regard productivity and safety regulations as mutually exclusive. He insists upon attention to helmets, gloves, industrial machinery, vertical lifting, and workers' lives. In this respect the one-act play offers a strong voice of professional ethics. Yet an individual's commitment and an institution's safety culture are different matters. Work is commencing at a hazardous site; necessary equipment is unavailable, the storekeeper procrastinates, and Manohar himself is pressed to arrive on time.



The material dangers of industrial work.

The final accident is not punishment for Manohar's supposedly mistaken 'preaching'; it exposes the failure of material provision and collective responsibility. When the beam falls, people suggest that a helmet might perhaps have saved his life. The play does not offer a conclusive accident investigation; it remains within the realm of 'perhaps'. Its social implication is sufficient: neither publicity songs nor a trainer's private discretion can make workers safe on their own.

3. Rita: Resistance to Patriarchy or Consumerist Self-Interest?

From her first appearance, Rita insists that her husband should not call her an anonymous 'Hey, are you listening?': she has a name of her own. This small rejoinder asserts the wife's personhood. She also rejects Singh's misogynistic jokes. To identify Rita as a villain from the outset would therefore contradict the text. Some of her statements are themselves defences of respect and the right to participate in decisions.

At the same time, Rita's attitude towards clubs, recreation, housework, and her son's conduct produces in Manohar a sense of neglect. The scenes mark the wife as 'modern', bringing together the possibility of female autonomy and the stereotyped image of domestic irresponsibility. Critical reading must disentangle them. Her objection that her husband wishes to impose his will upon every household decision is a social question; it is not, however, an argument that wife or son bears no responsibility at all. The one-act play leaves this tension unresolved.

4. Raj and Guddi: Linguistic Distance between Generations

The exchanges between Raj and Guddi signal romance, cigarettes, dancing, English forms of address, and youthful unruliness. A slap from Manohar deepens the crisis between father and son. He questions the rush towards marriage in view of Raj's educational position, and this anxiety has a practical basis. Yet public humiliation and the legitimacy of force must also be questioned. If paternal concern remains merely a moral command, the path to trusting dialogue closes.

The grandfather is puzzled by the relation between the forms 'Babuji' and 'Papa'. This verbal play produces humour, but also identifies a cultural gap between generations. English-inflected speech does not in itself prove the young people foolish; the real question is whether they are permitted to hear one another. Raj's choices may seem incomplete and immature, but his voice cannot simply be taken as a specimen of 'Western civilisation'. The play's effectiveness here lies in representing the failure of communication within the family.

5. The Grandfather: Mediation, Consolation, and Domestic Labour

The grandfather represents another generation, but his role is not limited to 'old ideas'. After Rita and Raj leave, he attempts to bring them home; he makes Manohar tea and helps him search for his helmet. Through these acts of concern, service, and mediation, 'cooperation' acquires a concrete domestic meaning. What existed as a doctrine on Manohar's tape becomes embodied in the elderly man's small actions.

The grandfather nevertheless indirectly blames his daughter Rita, risking the reduction of a familial crisis to an individual fault. To place the blame solely upon one woman or one young person would diminish the deeper question raised by a title founded upon collective responsibility. By extending its action into the industrial world, the text partially escapes that simplification.

6. The Storekeeper, Sardar, and Departmental Mismanagement

In the factory canteen, the storekeeper's astrologer's costume, his claims of access to senior officials, and his longing for promotion create satire. He turns Sardarji's fear of his near future into an occasion for financial exploitation. Within a modern factory, superstition, employees' insecurity, and the desire for advantage thus become intertwined. The irony is that the person responsible for properly

distributing safety equipment is engaged in private deception during working hours.

Manohar's inability to obtain a helmet is not simply an accidental oversight; it is connected with the failure of equipment management. The storekeeper's answer —that the required item is in a larger store and that there is no time— exemplifies the continual transfer of responsibility within industry. Such habits prevent clear assignment of accountability for risk. Manohar speaks of cooperation in its broadest sense, while the institution fails to provide the equipment he himself needs. In this sequence, the play becomes a significant criticism of industrial organisation.

7. Helmet and Beam: The Material Test of an Ethical Promise

A helmet is an ordinary protective object, but its absence acquires increasing significance in the plot. The search at home, the conversation with the grandfather, the store's refusal, a colleague's offer, and finally Manohar's entry into the hazardous site create a dramatic chain of causation around one object. When the beam falls, the audience has already been made aware of the missing helmet. The tragedy therefore arises not from a wholly unexpected shock but from foreshadowing.

The final stage image is especially meaningful. Darkness follows the industrial accident; then the scene returns to the same household, with English music playing and Raj reading a magazine. The original text ends at this point. The playwright supplies no explicit reconciliation, public inquiry, or account of workplace reform. The audience must construct the connection between the continuing music and the family's indifference. In contemporary terms, safety is neither a private slogan nor merely a regulatory document, but reciprocal vigilance and organised practice.

8. Generic Achievements and Critical Limits

The one-act structure depends upon the transition from home to factory and back home again. Lighting, projected shadows, recorded sound, and a sudden industrial noise expose a large social contrast with few resources. The repeated word 'cooperation' begins as a declaration and ends as piercing irony. The dramatic unity resides in that recurrence.

One weakness is that women's autonomy is repeatedly compressed into a derisive picture of the 'modern' housewife. Raj's conduct is also excessively one-dimensional. Other issues in the accident mechanism—supervision, the right to stop work, and management's obligations—are suggested in the play's lectures without being examined in detail. Despite these limitations, the opposition between title and ending is highly effective.

Conclusion

The ethical force of Sahyog is not that everyone at home must obey Manohar's commands. Its deeper meaning is that a system of safety remains alive only when rights, duties, resources, and mutual listening operate together. The play makes a conscientious man the victim of systemic non-cooperation: domestic failures of dialogue and industrial neglect injure the same life. The missing helmet gives this entire argument exceptional clarity.

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HINDI LITERARY CRITICISM / 04 / ONE-ACT PLAY 2: SUHĀGRĀT

From Factory Language to Marriage and Rehearsal: Institutional Satire and the Play within the Play in Suhāgrāt

Abstract

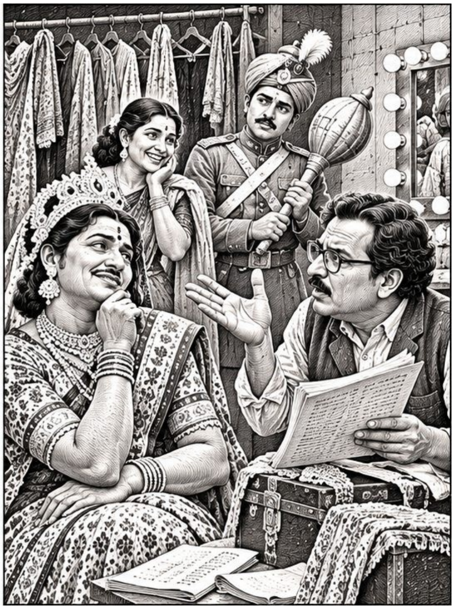
Suhāgrāt is an inventive experiment in short drama. During rehearsal for a departmental celebration, a male performer is asked to replace an absent actress and take the female role. Preparation for this 'double role' gradually becomes a satire of twenty-five years of marriage and the 'Home JDC', in which the industrial vocabulary of management and employees is imposed upon domestic life. The later sequence shows a theatre troupe, director, dancer, performers' parents, incongruous costumes, lapses of memory, and repeated demands for food frustrating theatrical discipline. This review centres on the play-within-the-play structure, gender performance, the factory's language of participation, actors' labour, popular comedy, and the fragmented yet meaningful conclusion.

Keywords

Suhāgrāt; play within a play; JDC; management; marriage; theatrical rehearsal; gender role; failure of performance.

1. The Opening: An Actress's Absence and the Change of Roles

The play begins with preparations for a short dramatic presentation during the department's silver-jubilee programme. The appointed actress is absent, producing pressure from management; the first actor asks a friend to play the female role. The request expresses a basic truth of theatre: a performer assumes a role distinct from personal identity. Here, however, that truth is conveyed through exaggerated praise, anxiety over employment, and an awkward negotiation between friends.



A theatrical rehearsal and changing roles.

A man's assumption of a female role provokes laughter, but reducing it to laughter at feminine dress would diminish the work's artistry. The performer corrects 'I shall speak' in the masculine to the feminine equivalent, substitutes a 'handkerchief' for an inappropriate line, and struggles to employ body and voice in a new social role. Acting is therefore a practice, not an inborn ease. The short play indirectly raises the question of how gender and social roles are constructed.

2. 'Home JDC': The Extension of Factory Logic into Domestic Life

The principal farce develops from calling married life a 'Home JDC'. The husband casts himself as 'management' and the wife as an 'employee'. As in a company, questions at home may be raised only with management's permission, problems must go to a committee, and decisions may be deferred indefinitely. The language at once reveals the unequal distribution of power within marriage. Managerial terms profess democratic participation in the external institution, yet at home, and in other contexts too, they are used to suppress dissenting voices.

The sharpest political insight of the farce lies here. The husband says that the wife cannot ask everything directly: she must write in advance, obtain approval, or whisper in his ear. Such 'participation' is not genuine cooperation but a polite vocabulary of control. By combining an institutional forum of worker–management consultation with family conversation within a single metaphor, the drama satirises the complacent language of management. The metaphor derives its force from comic excess.

3. Deferred Facilities and the Silver Jubilee of Marriage

The wife questions company housing, a sari, domestic assistance, food, and family aspirations. The husband alternately invokes elaborate grievance procedures, calculations of cost, and postponement 'until retirement'. Twenty-five years of marriage should occasion a celebration, yet the occasion brings forth a long inventory of unmet needs. The brightness of the silver jubilee is set against the lack of ordinary comforts.

The exchanges also touch upon the marriage's childlessness. The desire for a child becomes another 'problem' for the Home JDC, its solution endlessly deferred through meetings, 'minutes', and attempts. Beneath the humour lies the possibility of private suffering. The text treats the issue in the register of risqué joking; criticism must also recognise the disregard of a sensitive aspect of life as a limit of that humour.

4. Scene Transitions and the Complexity of Dramatic Form

After the marital farce, the presented text moves to rehearsals involving a director, a dancer, 'Mummy', a beggar, a minister, a king, a queen, and a soldier. The process of producing a performance becomes the dramatic subject itself. The initial crisis over a single role spreads throughout the troupe. Performers stumble over their parts, speeches, costumes, and movements. The play has now moved well beyond the private occasion of a wedding night to ask how theatre is made —and how it falls apart.

The transition is also formally uneven. A clear narrative link between the initial industrial-marital satire and the later courtly rehearsals weakens. It is difficult to read them as one indivisible realist plot; their structure is clearer when they are understood as a sequence of farcical episodes. The audience sees not the life story of a single character but a theatre group failing in its attempts to make a performance.

5. The Struggle for Authority between Director and Performers

The director wants control over scenery, dance, dialogue, and scheduling. The dancer insists upon imitating popular cinema dances; the director demands bodily discipline appropriate to the court scene. 'Mummy' intervenes on behalf of her child; the minister cannot see through the wrong spectacles; the soldier brings a mace instead of a sword. Such ordinary material mistakes produce a conflict between artistic intention and performers' independent conduct.

The director's anger is not merely personal impatience. The scheduled performance is approaching, while the collective organisation of artistic labour is collapsing. Each performer gives priority to private convenience and familial prestige, continually frustrating the creation of a collective work. In this sense Suhāgrāt raises a demanding question of theatre pedagogy: where should one

draw the boundary between creative freedom and collective discipline? The author offers comic experimentation rather than a solution.

6. Courtly Farce: The 'Beggar' and the Uncontrolled Slippage of Language

The beggar's entrance during rehearsal, his claim to have travelled from Calcutta without a ticket, advice to describe himself as 'the king's brother-in-law', and the paradox of prohibiting him from begging as punishment—all belong to the comedy of language. Exchanges between king, queen, and minister are repeatedly interrupted by the performers' actual needs. The king keeps saying 'bathroom'; the gravity of the supposed punishment collapses into the ordinary question of hunger.

The alleged penalty of forbidding the beggar to beg becomes self-contradictory, since the arrangements for food and the performers' hunger emerge as real problems on stage. When the proclamations of an official order do not answer daily necessities, they become absurd. Read beside the 'Home JDC' of the first half, this short courtly scene reveals the same disjunction between managerial decisions and material needs.

7. Food and the Final Failure

At the end, snacks arrive for the performers. The director protests against eating before the rehearsal is finished, but the performers' parents give priority to hunger. The director dismisses the scattered players. In his final spoken despair, the work makes the failure before a performance itself into a stage scene. No formally 'successful show' is depicted: what is presented is the continuing incompleteness of artistic creation.

The food episode is not merely exaggerated humour; it also raises questions about performers' labour. Hunger and fatigue are genuine, though they may also become grounds for evading collective work. The one-act play's entertaining dispute rests on this duality. The director's exclamation that he will 'kill himself' is theatrical hyperbole, not a literal plan for life.

8. Formal Strengths and Critical Limits

Suhāgrāt derives its strength from making rehearsal itself a theatrical subject. Gender performance, the JDC metaphor, mixed Hindi–English speech, the silver jubilee, costume errors, and the incomplete imitation of a royal court together generate a double satire. The audience laughs at the characters while recognising the difficulties of theatrical production. The means of presentation themselves become content.

Its limitation is that mockery of the female role and the emotional sensitivity surrounding a childless marriage receive insufficiently serious critical treatment. Weak connections between scenes make the work seem less a unified story than a

chain of independent theatrical farces. Yet the playwright's experimentation deserves appreciation within these limits: he turns failure on the stage into a successful subject for acting, rather than merely into a failed work.

Conclusion

Suhāgrāt imposes the vocabulary of modern industrial life upon marriage, then places the entire theatrical ensemble within conflicts of discipline, acting ability, and private aspirations. When the JDC's 'participation' becomes an instrument of control and the 'government' of the courtly play succumbs to the performers' hunger, the distance between authority and actual practice becomes visible. The real subject of this short drama is not simply the wedding night but the mischievous struggle between the language of discipline and the uncontrollable realities of life.

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HINDI LITERARY CRITICISM / 05 / MEMORIAL POEM 1: SĀLĪ KO EK PATRA

A Holi Invitation and the Comedy of Exchange: The Domestic Verse-Letter Sālī Ko Ek Patra

Abstract

The occasion for Sālī Ko Ek Patra is presented in a reminiscence by Kusum Thakur, the wife of Lallan Prasad Thakur. Family members extend an invitation for Holi while enclosing a long list of items to bring; the playwright replies in humorous verse. The list, hospitality, expense, the intimacy of kinship, and a final joke about a kiss turn a private letter into a shared comic creation. This review examines the short poem's forms of address, domestic economy, festive character of Holi, and questions of social propriety between women and men.

Keywords

Holi; epistolary poetry; kinship; family; humour; household expenditure; Lallan Prasad Thakur.

1. Context and Authorial Voice

The work is not a formal poetry-recital piece or a slogan for a public political campaign. Kusum Thakur's reminiscence in the collected volume explains that the family's brothers and sisters sent a Holi invitation and playfully added a list of many required articles. Lallan Prasad Thakur wrote his answer in verse. Both authorship and occasion are thus made clear: it would be mistaken to attribute the poem's first-person voice to Kusum Thakur.

The letter's poetry arises less from formal ornament than from material domestic detail. Clothing, pillows, mosquito nets, semolina, refined flour, ordinary flour, and sugar form the basis of the humour. The cultural privilege of receiving guests confronts the obligation of paying for their demands. The Holi invitation becomes a consumer inventory rather than remaining a simple welcome. The poet turns the list around: those demanding the articles should send the money as well.

2. Kinship Intimacy and the Address 'Sālī'

The recurrent 'Sālī Jī' activates a social convention of affectionate teasing between a man and his wife's sister. The refusal of unreasonable demands is not harsh rejection but a discussion of expense within the circle of intimacy. The willingness to accept cramped accommodation rather than a specially prepared bed combines modesty with wit. Against that, the request for the full cost of the long shopping list gives voice to economic reality.

The closing joke about a kiss is light teasing by the standards of social propriety. It can be read within the festive banter of a family letter; nevertheless, representing the woman as a 'kiss' offered in return also has an uncomfortable gendered aspect open to criticism. The poem is brief and playful, so this suggestion should not be treated as proof of settled conduct. A critical reading records both the power of the humour and its social limit.

3. Rhythm and the Poetry of Household Things

The movement of its verse sentences is free; strict metrical discipline is not its primary feature. Words such as 'invitation', 'goods', 'money', 'telegram', and 'money order' dramatise the social practice of correspondence. From the standpoint of our own time, the telegram and the money order are specific

signs of communication before the digital age; a material history of household financial exchange is carried in these words.

The list is a central comic device. As the names of things accumulate, the recipient's astonishment grows. The utterly unexpected 'price' proposed in the reply's final line produces an eruption of comedy. In this short work, verbal incongruity becomes a poetic example of the playwright's dialogue-based sense of humour.

4. Evaluation

The importance of Sālī Ko Ek Patra does not lie in an aspiration to become high philosophical poetry. Its achievement is the transformation of a private incident into verbal wit. The reader experiences Holi's colour, teasing among loved ones, and the ordinary pain of expense together. A small episode of domestic life is preserved within literary memory. Brevity is the poem's strength, though its dependence on the occasion makes the introductory reminiscence useful for an outside reader. The playwright's public satirical sensibility assumes a form of affection within this intimacy.

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HINDI LITERARY CRITICISM / 06 / MEMORIAL SONG 2: SAB SAPNĀ BAN KE MILE

The Emptiness of Separation Amid an Abundance of Happiness: The Lyrical Philosophy of Life in Sab Sapnā Ban Ke Mile

Abstract

Sab Sapnā Ban Ke Mile is presented in the collected volume as a song written by Lallan Prasad Thakur and later used in a memorial tribute. Its basis is the opposition between companionship in times of happiness and solitude in times of suffering. Images of flowers, lamps, storms, deserted courtyards, the sea, and pearls condense a broad philosophical experience into an accessible rhythm. This review considers the repeated refrain, opposed pairs of symbols, loneliness, the uncertainty of social relationships, and the song's later memorial setting.

Keywords

Hindi song; Lallan Prasad Thakur; memory; loneliness; joy and suffering; refrain; symbolism.

1. Presentation of the Text and Attribution

The introductory note published in the collection makes it clear that on Lallan Prasad Thakur's death anniversary, homage was paid with a song he himself had written. It is therefore necessary to distinguish the poet's voice from this later use of the song. In its own right the work concerns the transience of human relationships in general; the memorial context adds the sorrowful light of a further absence to its meaning.

The phonetic proximity of 'sapnā' (dream) and 'apnā' (one's own) in the refrain bears the song's central feeling. Those once thought to be our own become as unstable as dreams when circumstances change. The experience can encompass love, friendship, society, and memory. The song does not depend upon the name of a particular person or a single incident; it attempts to speak with general force.

2. Flowers and Lamps: Opposed Worlds of Happiness and Suffering

The first stanza contrasts the abundance of companions in times of happiness with a rare flower in a deserted courtyard. The flower garden and the deserted place represent the difference between social presence and absence. In the second stanza, a bright path and a lamp burning within the secure walls of a house confront a lamp struggling in fierce winds of suffering. The song's ethical insight is that shining in favourable circumstances is easy, while endurance in adversity is difficult.

The simplicity of these images is a strength for a song meant to be sung widely. Familiar objects replace difficult abstractions. The resulting division of feeling, however, is somewhat direct: companions in happiness appear largely self-interested, while those who remain in suffering seem rare. Human relationships may be more complex than this polarity. The song captures an intense moment of experience rather than offering a complete sociological theory.

3. From the Crowd to the Depths of the Sea

The last stanza moves from finding no peace in a crowd to an invitation to solitude. The possibility of finding a pearl in the depths of the sea represents a passage from external noise towards inner exploration. The pearl may signify a rare truth or trustworthiness, but the original text does not assign it a definitive symbolic meaning. That openness makes participation by the reader possible.

Between the vast extensions of earth and sky, the lack of anyone truly 'one's own' becomes especially poignant. Personal grief and existential solitude here merge. The repeating refrain transforms the feeling from muted sorrow into a deeper renunciation. Each time the song returns to its recurring line, a new image changes its resonance.

4. Song Form and Critical Value

Easy rhyme, a recurring refrain, parallel comparisons, and familiar spoken Hindi suit the song to staged singing. To associate it with a particular tune or documented historical performance would require independent evidence; the text alone cannot establish either. The primary source of its critical strength is the emotionally resonant repetition of simple utterances.

Sab Sapnā Ban Ke Mile is a soliloquy on the uncertainty of human companionship. The opposition between joy and suffering, the scarce flower and the struggling lamp, and loneliness amid the crowd give the song particular meaning at an occasion of remembrance. Its value, however, is not solely derived from the tribute: it also gives concentrated expression to an independent human experience.

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The Return of Memory and a Woman's Private Voice: A Lyrical Reading of Kusum Thakur's Chāhat Tumhārī Phir Se

Abstract

Chāhat Tumhārī Phir Se is a song by Kusum Thakur published in the collection's Hindi memorial section. Composed in the context of a birthday, it brings together the beloved's absence, the reawakening of memory, the restoration of hope, and the pain of separation. Its shifting images of 'sleeping hope', a 'ravaged garden', a 'dried rose', and 'new shoots' connect two opposing experiences of time: loss and renewal. This review examines authorial attribution, the lyric speaker's rhythm, floral imagery, the absent beloved, and the social meaning of memorial writing.

Keywords

Kusum Thakur; Chāhat Tumhārī Phir Se; women's voice; memory; separation; birthday; floral imagery.

1. Authorship and the Occasion of Remembrance

The name 'Kusum Thakur' is clearly inscribed at the end of this work. To treat it as Lallan Prasad Thakur's own poem would contradict the evidence of authorship. The inclusion of his wife's poetry in a collected volume centred upon the playwright is itself an act of memorial history: alongside his creative achievement, it preserves domestic affection, grief, and the continuing story of shared life. The phrase '5 February, on the birthday' clarifies the occasion, but does not establish a particular year of composition or authorise the inference of events absent from the text.

Through 'once again' in its opening line, the poem announces the recurrence of experience. Desire is not a feeling lived only once; memory gives it a new form. The recollection of the absent beloved is active within the present. For this reason the song is not a passive report of grief but a reconstruction of emotional life through memory.

2. The Parallel Images of Hope and a Ruined Garden

The song opens with the image of awakening sleeping hope. Later references to a ravaged garden and a withered rose give material form to separation from the beloved. The rose is a familiar emblem of love, but its dried condition is important here: the poem does not praise the unchanging beauty of a flower; it

shows a flower altered by time's injury. Hope awakens, but loss is not erased. This doubleness gives the lyric its pathos.

The closing lines evoke fresh growth through shoots, buds, fragrance, and pollen. The sequence of imagery does not advance in a straight line from despair to the ultimate triumph of happiness. A new bud shines, yet the voice of love 'given away' to the beloved remains inseparable from the memory of present absence. Renewal here is the art of living with the consciousness of loss.

3. The Female First Person and the Rewriting of Love

Kusum Thakur's poem gives an independent place to a woman's voice. Private memory is not merely an appendix to the biography of a public figure: it is the poetic representation of a woman's own time, beloved, and experience. A question such as 'What shall we call desire?' becomes an admission of the difficulty of defining love. Love is known less through verbal definition than through the experience created by separation.

The lyric's distinction lies in the feeling of renewed dedication. Remembering the beloved awakens pain, but the poet does not reject that remembrance. Grief and love are not opposites here; each gives meaning to the other. The woman's voice records a history of private life. Reducing this history merely to evidence for the playwright's biography would diminish the poem's independent creativity.

4. Rhythm, Imagery, and Limits

The lyric's lines are brief; end-rhyme and verbs of similar sound establish its emotional movement. The recurrent phrases 'sajā diyā', 'jagā diyā', 'chiṛhā diyā', 'rulā diyā', and 'luṭā diyā' create a remarkable combination of completed action and renewed beginning in memory. Each past-tense declaration generates another effect in the present. Thus even this small poem constructs a complete cycle of feeling.

The poem's symbolic language belongs to a familiar romantic tradition: rose, garden, bud, fragrance, and pollen. Their familiarity makes it readily communicable, though it lessens the originality of the images. Their particular sequence—hope awakened, rose dried, new bud—nevertheless gives the composition its inner coherence.

Conclusion

The enduring significance of Chāhat Tumhārī Phir Se lies in Kusum Thakur's autonomous voice of remembrance. Lallan Prasad Thakur remains the centre of the collected volume, but the song's author records the beloved's absence through her own experience and language. Returning love, the acknowledgement of injury, and images of renewed growth make the poem more than a family tribute: it is an independent lyric of private experience. This

final work gives the collected writings a human response: where the public theatre-maker is absent, the remembering voice remains alive.

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PART 13

Nit Naval: Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary

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SECTION ONE · NOVELS / REVIEW 1

1. Abhiśapta: The Educated Middle Class's Self-Contradictions, Marital Power, and the Disintegration of Social Ethics

An Extended Literary Review of a Novel by Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary

Abstract

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary's Abhiśapta is a significant work in the realist current of the modern Maithili novel, in which social anomalies and an individual's inner conflicts illuminate one another. At its centre stands no supernatural curse but a mental prison of human making. The educated middle class's self-regard and concern for prestige, inequalities within marriage, differences of values between generations, self-interest in friendship, disorder in office life, and hollowness within the public world of literature appear as interconnected phenomena. The relationship between Prakash and Meera is especially important, for educational attainment and social standing do not guarantee democracy within the family. The male ego that seeks to diminish a wife ultimately endangers the man's own life. Critically considered, the novel's strengths lie in its searching observation of society, the dialectical movement of its dialogue, and its exposure of the characters' moral self-deception. At the same time, the directness with which ideas emerge in certain aspects of characterisation can risk limiting artistic plurality of meaning. This review closely examines the text's social and psychological structures, engages with external criticism, and situates the novel within the modern prose tradition of Maithili.

Keywords: Abhiśapta; Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary; Maithili novel; middle class; Meera; Prakash; women's autonomy; realism; social satire.

1. Introduction: The Secular Meaning of the Curse

At first sight the title Abhiśapta, 'Accursed', suggests a cruel decree of fate. In the world of this novel, however, the curse is not a divine punishment imposed from outside. The narrative gradually discloses the process by which people acquire suffering through their own dispositions, decisions, relationships, and institutional conduct. Here the title poses an ethical question: who suffers, who causes the suffering, and what kind of social order makes the penalty seem inevitable? The answer cannot be found by assigning blame to one individual. Prabhas shows the interdependence of a person's innermost life and public existence.

The development of modern Maithili prose has a long history of aspirations towards social reform. Within that tradition, this novel attends to the

complications of everyday conduct rather than becoming a manifesto for reform. An educated person is not necessarily discerning; nor is someone who speaks the language of ideals in public necessarily just towards those closest to him at home. In this gap Abhiśapta fashions its critique, at once satirical and compassionate.

2. Creative Context and the Maithili Novel's Social World

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary is a familiar literary presence in both short fiction and the novel. His writing transforms social experience into compelling situations without depending solely upon the attraction of events. In the novel volume of Prabhas Samagra, Abhiśapta is placed first, followed by Yugpuruṣ, Hamrā Lag Rahab?, Navārambha, and Rājā Pokharime Katek Machharī? In this sequence, Abhiśapta may be regarded as an important point of entry for understanding the early sensibility of the author's work as a novelist.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the growth of the educated strata, institutional employment, urban intellectual circles, and changing relations of roles within the family provided literature with new subjects. Abhiśapta does not treat this transition merely as an external circumstance; it examines its effects upon the characters' language, self-image, and processes of decision-making. The novel's 'middle class' is therefore not simply the name of an economic category. It is a particular mental world lived between the desire for prestige and the experience of insecurity.

3. The Narrative Premise: From Personal Crisis to Social Structure

The fictional world develops through several intersecting contradictions. Dissatisfaction marks the private relationship between husband and wife; the reliability of friendship is in question in social life; duty clashes with self-interest at work; and a gap separates creative integrity from the performance of prestige in literary circles. The conjunction of these distinct spheres is not accidental but forms the artistic arrangement of the work's central idea. The deceit, competition, and distrust apparent in public life also enter domestic life in subtler forms.

Prakash's struggle matters especially because an account confined to external causes of his deprivation would leave the story incomplete. His insistence on placing himself at the centre, his inferiority complex and displays of superiority towards his educated wife Meera, and his tendency to regard a relationship as an entitlement rather than a partnership deepen his predicament. While criticising social circumstances, the writer does not release individuals from responsibility. In this respect the narrative resists determinism.

4. Prakash: The Self-Defeat of the Educated Ego

To describe Prakash merely as hero or villain would diminish his complexity. The distance between the image he has of himself and the injuries his conduct

inflicts upon other lives generates a productive tension in the story. The self-understanding that ought to accompany education fails to develop because of his rigid defence of self-esteem. For him respect appears tied to external approval, male predominance, and the preservation of his self-image. Consequently, opportunities for dialogue turn into occasions for dispute.

Prakash's irony is that his efforts to secure dominance repeatedly disclose his own insecurity. Someone afraid of conversation between equals begins to belittle the other person in order to establish his own worth. A woman's education or judgement then becomes not an enrichment of life together but a challenge to masculine pride. In depicting this breakdown, the writer connects an individual's moral weakness with social conditioning. The question for the critic is whether one can both understand the difficulties of Prakash's life and criticise his behaviour; an adequate reading preserves precisely this dual perspective.

5. Meera: Education, Self-Respect, and the Unequal Ground of Marriage

As an educated woman, Meera constitutes an important point of moral discernment in the novel. Her presence demonstrates that inequality within the family is not solely a problem of illiteracy or an older generation. A couple possessing modern education may still be caught in inherited notions of authority. Attempts to belittle Meera reveal Prakash's weakness; they do not diminish her human worth. The issue raised by the female character concerns the relation between knowledge and power as much as her individual suffering.

Meera must not be read merely as an instrument of a male character's development. Her education, responses, and self-respect carry meanings of their own. The expectation that a wife should be only an emblem of sacrifice becomes, within this work, a social assumption open to scrutiny. We therefore need to go beyond discussing the lack of harmony between Prakash and Meera and examine the power structure of marriage itself. Where respect is distributed unequally, declarations of love are insufficient. The novel's questions concerning women are particularly pertinent to contemporary readers for this reason.

6. Marriage: Possession in Place of Love

Marriage in this novel is not merely the private sphere of the household; it is the first testing ground for society's ethics. The claims of prestige and control intrude upon a relationship that should rest upon equality, affection, and recognition of each partner's independent personhood. Dialogue then comes to a halt, while the language of self-justification displaces a sense of wrongdoing. Before asking how much love exists, it becomes necessary to ask who is expected to surrender personal wishes in the name of love.

Prakash's behaviour makes the reader consider how ego transforms the shared world of a relationship into a unilateral code. To consider Meera inferior is not simply an affront to one woman; it also denies the human value of education.

The novel's 'curse' acquires depth from this self-contradiction: under the pretext of protecting personal pride, a man destroys the very foundation upon which his happiness might have rested.

7. Generational Differences and Changing Social Values

The distance between generations is a significant social thread in the work. Modernity does not enter every part of a family at the same pace: attitudes towards life, acceptable conduct, conceptions of moral authority, and expectations of relations between women and men can differ among age groups. Older values are not necessarily innocent, just as newer values are not automatically liberating. The author locates these tensions in the conduct of his characters.

It would be restrictive to see generational conflict simply as a struggle between old and young. The more important question is whether the language of rights and responsibilities changes when generations change. If, despite adopting modern occupations, education, and urban habits, someone refuses equality in family conversation, the new age merely perpetuates old inequalities in another form. Here Abhiśapta tests easy assumptions about progress.

8. Friendship, Self-Interest, and Social Trust

The critical treatment of artificiality in the relationship between two friends broadens the novel's social reach. Friendship is ordinarily understood as a voluntary bond of trust and mutual assistance, but middle-class competition can turn it into an instrument of convenience, prestige, or private gain. This transformation shows the reader how the outward name of a relationship may remain intact even after its inner substance has disappeared.

The episodes involving marriage and friendship become reflections of one another. In both, the distance between words and conduct is decisive. The claim to public decency made by someone who cannot be trusted in an intimate relationship becomes questionable. The narrative subjects public image to the demanding test of private conduct.

9. Office Culture: The Erosion of Discipline and Institutional Ethics

The portrayal of indiscipline in the office carries the narrative beyond the confines of the home. Institutions depend not only upon written rules but also upon justice, accountability, and trust in practice. When duty is obscured by self-interest, favouritism, procrastination, and anxiety about reputation, an institution becomes an extension of individual weakness. These office episodes become more meaningful when we recognise that the novel's people are not one kind of moral being at home and another outside it.

The novel suggests that education and the attainment of office within modern bureaucracy do not prove moral maturity. The distance between the formal

language of the workplace and the actual tendencies of conduct provides material for social satire. Individuals are indeed at fault, but it is also necessary to ask whether the system encourages their faults or possesses the capacity to restrain them. At this point the narrative moves from a criticism of individuals towards a criticism of institutions.

10. Pretension in the Literary World: The Rare Courage of Self-Criticism

One notable feature of Abhiśapta is its attention to pretension within literary circles. The world of literature is commonly regarded as a protected sphere of cultural ethics; the writer challenges this comfortable belief. The desire for position, prestige, praise, and public display can corrupt the evaluation of creative labour. A person who discusses literature is not thereby certain to embody literary integrity.

The importance of this satire is not confined to amusement. It attests to the writer's willingness to look critically at his own field. Masculine ego in the home, self-interest in friendship, and the performance of literary prestige are different manifestations of a wider structure: diminishing another person's existence or the truth in order to protect one's own image. Pretension conducted in the name of literature is thus not a digression from the novel's central concern but an extension of it.

11. The Combined Register of Satire, Irony, and Compassion

In Prabhas's narrative language, an awareness of social contradictions appears through both compassion and barbed observation. If the novelist only ridiculed his characters, their inward suffering would disappear; if he offered only sympathy, the critical perspective upon their unjust conduct would be weakened. The novel negotiates these two demands. A reader may smile at a character's self-deception, but when that deception produces pain in marriage and social relationships, unease takes the place of laughter.

The irony of the title deserves particular attention. A person called 'accursed' is not necessarily an innocent victim; on many occasions he participates in making his own suffering. This profound ethical complication opens up the heart of the realist novel: circumstances influence human actions, but actions in turn reshape circumstances. Because of this reciprocity, the novel's moral understanding becomes more complex than a one-directional accusation.

12. A Dialogue-Driven Design and Narrative Perspective

Many passages of the novel advance through dialogue and immediate responses. Within this structure, the narrator does not lay out a character's entire state of mind for the reader all at once but allows meaning to develop between every reply, objection, and silence. Readers witness not only events but also the

interpretations that the characters give them. These layers disclose the social significance of private disagreements.

Yet dialogue-driven narration carries a danger: when characters become ready-made representatives of ideas, the uncertainty of living experience may recede. The most successful passages of Abhiśapta are those in which a character's own words reveal that person in an unexpected light; future choices remain questions rather than foregone conclusions. Criticism must consider this openness of meaning alongside the movement of dialogue.

13. Narrative Language, Social Registers, and the Pace of Prose

Prabhas's Maithili narrative language draws its energy from the practicalities of social contact. Its linguistic stance changes across domestic behaviour, forms of address between intimates, office formality, and the self-display of literary circles. Consequently, the characters are recognised not only through names and events but through the ways in which they speak.

The frequency of dialogue quickens the prose and creates the pressure of argument. Brief intervals of description nevertheless clarify the psychological setting. Such balance of pace matters in the social novel, for excessive explanation can turn a story into an argumentative treatise, while excessive incident can make its analysis of society superficial. The alternation of episode, debate, and commentary in Abhiśapta may be read as a sustained effort to maintain that balance.

14. Engagement with External Criticism

In his sociological study of the Maithili novel, Dr Arun Kumar Jha regards Abhiśapta as a realist work and stresses its depiction of diverse social problems. Drawing upon the critical observations of Dr Durganath Jha 'Śrīś', he mentions generational imbalance, artificiality in friendship, individualistic tensions in marriage, indiscipline in offices, and literary pretension. When this inventory is regarded not simply as a list of subjects but as different forms of one shared ethical structure, the novel's unity becomes more apparent.

While agreeing with this critical tradition, an extension is necessary. To identify Prakash's failure only as personal arrogance risks concealing the role of patriarchal conditioning. The social training that sustains male authority must therefore figure in any account of his treatment of Meera. Conversely, attributing every fault to 'the system' erases Prakash's own choices and moral responsibility. A balanced review studies these two aspects not as adversaries but as mutually illuminating concerns.

15. The Achievements of Realism and Its Artistic Limits

The novel's most significant achievement is to turn apparently isolated personal failings into symptoms of a larger social malaise. Through familiar examples, the

writer shows how inequality within the family, self-interest in friendship, deceit at work, and literary conceit, though apparently distinct problems, are signs of a common ethical disintegration. Many episodes therefore converge upon one experience and one question: how far has a society that has acquired the outward marks of modernity become modern within?

The limitations of realist writing must also be recognised. When social faults are identified too clearly, moral conclusions can become predictable. If the reader already knows which behaviour is wrong, the narrative risks serving merely to confirm that knowledge. Serious literature has another responsibility: to represent characters' inner contradictions in ways that can alter the reader's own certainties. The possibility of this more demanding experience becomes clearest in Abhiśapta when we move beyond the language of blame to examine the social production of suffering.

16. Contemporary Relevance: Democracy in Relationships Matters More Than Education Alone

The novel's social questions have not remained confined to their original period. If, despite expanded opportunities for education and employment, husbands and wives do not recognise one another as equal agents in decisions, the claim to modernity remains incomplete. If, despite the expansion of workplace regulations, the arrogance of rank and private advantage prevail, institutional culture remains weak. If, although social media or literary platforms have changed, the traffic in praise takes the place of creative merit, pretension has merely altered its form.

To read Abhiśapta today is thus to examine our own private conduct. The question is not only which character we disagree with; it is what subtle forms of Prakash's self-deception we discover in our everyday relationships. Literature's durability lies in its power to ask this uncomfortable question.

17. Conclusion: Not a Curse but a Call to Self-Examination

The importance of Abhiśapta lies in its contribution to the realist expansion of the modern Maithili novel. Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary does not isolate marital tensions from other spheres of society. The relationship between Prakash and Meera confronts readers with questions of gendered power and self-respect; generational imbalance reveals the incompleteness of changing values; friendship and office life expose the unreliability of public conduct; and literary pretension demonstrates the writer's courage in criticising his own milieu.

In the end, the title also conveys the possibility of resistance. If human beings fashion their curse through ego, self-interest, and injustice, the possibility of escaping it must likewise reside in human decisions. Prabhas's critical realism makes that possibility visible. The novel's literary value consists not in supplying ready-made moral answers, but in entrusting readers with the difficult task of

recognising the inequality and deceit that persist within their own educated civilisation.

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NOVELS / REVIEW 2

2. Yugpuruṣ: False Glorification, Social Exploitation, and an Ironic Narrative of the Spirit of an Age

An Extended Literary Review of a Novel by Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary

Abstract

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary's Yugpuruṣ offers a representation of social reality in the modern Maithili novel in which the inconsistencies of individual lives gradually become questions about a collective political culture. Its major points of inquiry include the mysterious setting of its opening in Banaras; Shankar's questioning childhood and the gradual weakening of his sense of rights; the varied relationships of Karunesh, Rosie, Raman, Anand, and others; the love episodes involving Champa and Shobha; and Ratna's condition under the weight of poverty and exploitation. The title Yugpuruṣ, 'Man of the Age', is not a straightforward celebration of greatness. Rather, it examines a public world in which the connections among fame, social usefulness, and moral worth have become unstable. Ratna's helplessness, the violent pressures of the surrounding world, and incomplete resistance raise a difficult question: through what processes does a socially oppressed person acquire political significance, and whose interests are concealed within that person's glorification? This review examines plot, character development, social class relationships, representations of women, dialogue, satire, and the work's inherent artistic limitations. In engagement with earlier Maithili criticism, it concludes that the novel's central achievement is not the discovery of a 'great' individual but the exposure of contradictions in the social construction of greatness.

Keywords: Yugpuruṣ; Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary; Ratna; Shankar; Maithili novel; social reality; political satire; class exploitation; characterisation; consciousness of an age.

1. Introduction: The Critical Meaning of 'Yugpuruṣ'

In the tradition of literature in Indian languages, the word Yugpuruṣ generally denotes an exceptional person regarded as representative of the thought, struggles, or transformation of an age. From a novel bearing this title, readers might expect an idealistic life of courage, sacrifice, or the making of history. Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary does not fulfil that expectation in any simple manner. The people who appear in his story are imperfect, subject to circumstances, caught in conflicts of desire, and sometimes indifferent to questions of their own rights and responsibilities. The title therefore acquires its richest meaning through inversion and irony.

The initial question is, 'Who has been called the man of the age?' The deeper question is, 'Whom does society turn into such a figure, and under what circumstances?' The novel tests the distance between personal significance and public standing through social exploitation, opportunity, morality, relationships, and collective memory. This satire is not superficial mockery. It is a criticism of the social processes through which political identities are formed.

2. The Author and the Work's Historical and Literary Context

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary is a representative writer of modern Maithili fiction and prose. His novels present, in various forms, immediate social experience, tensions between individuals and institutions, and the disintegration of public ethics. In Abhiśapta, the tensions of educated middle-class family relationships are particularly clear; in Yugpuruṣ the social horizon expands to include exploitation, political reputation, and a variety of class positions. Instead of treating his work as a repetition of a single problem, we should regard it as an extended inquiry into social experience.

The novel volume of Prabhas Samagra was edited by Dr Vandana Chaudhary and preserves five distinct novels. Accordingly, the critical basis for interpreting Yugpuruṣ must be its own narrative evidence; neither the author's fame nor an award received by another book can substitute for literary evaluation. The later collected edition is an important undertaking in textual preservation, but the grounds of criticism remain this work's plot, organisation of characters, and social vision.

3. The Banaras Opening: Mystery, Inquiry, and the Formation of a Worldview

The novel begins in a mysterious atmosphere associated with Banaras. The city's cultural significance operates at several levels: inherited knowledge and religious prestige; the varied social encounters of urban life; and personal doubts beneath an outward spiritual aura. The presence of Banaras gives gravity to the opening experience, since the characters' world is neither simple nor unambiguous from the first moment. The desire to discover reality and uncertainty about the visible world appear together.

This opening has particular critical importance. Had the work focused solely upon political contradiction, the language of social declaration might have governed it from the start. Instead, the union of mystery and curiosity allows the reader to discover the world through a character's viewpoint. It gives the narrative a structure that moves from the geography of personal experience towards the public order. Yet the city's 'mystery' should be understood as an artistic quality of the atmosphere created by the story, not as an absolute truth about Banaras itself.

4. Shankar: The Desire for Knowledge and the Erosion of the Sense of Rights

Shankar first appears as an inquisitive figure. He wishes to understand the meaning of facts he has heard, seen, and been told. In this questioning childhood, the novel presents a fundamental moment in the formation of the modern individual: instead of merely accepting the surrounding world, a child wishes to understand its justification. Shankar's childhood has been compared with that of Shekhar in Agyeya's Śekhar: Ek Jīvanī. Such a comparison does not make the two works identical in narrative purpose, but it opens a useful opportunity to consider the relation between curiosity and social prohibitions.

A difficult turn in Shankar's character is his indifference towards rights. One might expect an inquisitive consciousness to develop naturally into an awareness of rights, yet the narrative unsettles confidence in such effortless progress. A person may recognise contradictions in the world without assuming an organised role in opposing them; that is a genuine social problem. In the writer's vision, the clash between individual and circumstance does not invariably culminate in heroism. Shankar's change can become an artistic achievement if readers sense its inner causes, but it also becomes an artistic problem if the psychological links in his transformation do not appear sufficiently developed.

5. The Shifting Narrative Centre: From Shankar to Ratna

To read Yugpuruṣ as a linear account of a single hero would fail to grasp its actual shape. Shankar's early curiosity provides an entrance into the narrative, but the novel's broader criticism of society comes to focus more sharply upon Ratna's fate. Shankar, Karunesh, Rosie, Raman, Anand, and other characters bring their own episodes to the unfolding story. This arrangement places individual lives within the layered network of society.

The shift in narrative focus admits two interpretations. One may regard it as artistic diffusion: the reader's original point of orientation breaks apart as characters move in unexpected directions. Another may understand it as purposeful polycentrism: the truth of political reality cannot be contained within one individual. The work must be evaluated between these possibilities. The formal tension of Yugpuruṣ is inseparable from their coexistence.

6. Ratna: Poverty, Social Subordination, and the Question of Glorification

Ratna is central to the novel's social and political meanings. Ratna's condition is bound up with material deprivation, social insecurity, and exploitation in a rural setting. Poverty is no abstract backdrop here. It constricts a person's options, imposes external pressures upon ethical conduct, and makes the paths towards social standing unequal. Alongside 'What decision did this person make?' we must ask, 'What choices were available to that person?'

Through Ratna, the work exposes the contradiction between the oppressed person and the supposed 'man of the age'. How does someone unable to escape oppression in the immediate environment become associated with a title of public significance? If the designation of 'greatness' is influenced by the prevailing distribution of power, that judgement need not be just. The title's satire is not personal ridicule of Ratna. It criticises a social condition in which inequality produces its own representatives and then uses them symbolically.

7. The Absence of Resistance: Moral Failure or Structural Constraint?

In Ratna's case, the critical tradition raises a question: why, despite recognising the surrounding conditions, was Ratna unable to take a clear stand of resistance? It is a legitimate question, but to answer it by making an oppressed person responsible for their own oppression would be a grave mistake. Exploitation is not merely the act of one unjust individual; it may be grounded in money, personal connections, communal standing, unequal access to resources, and institutional protection.

Awareness of injustice alone is insufficient for resistance. Education, support, safety, collective organisation, and the capacity to endure adverse consequences are also needed. From this perspective, Ratna's silence or inaction may be read as evidence of a wider social failure. If the author reveals the consequences of the absence of resistance, the critic must also analyse its social causes. The novel's political meaning becomes richer when the dignity of the oppressed person and the social constraints upon that person are read together.

8. Class Relations: Rural Poverty and the Distribution of Power

In Yugpuruṣ, references to rural poverty do more than create an atmosphere of sympathy; they enter the chain of causes governing characters' social mobility and crises. Society does not judge the conduct of the deprived and the affluent by identical standards. An action that one class regards as a natural means of acquiring prestige may become a cause of humiliation or accusation for another. The novel implicitly questions this unequal moral order.

Religion, class, and local social standing subject Ratna not to one kind of difficulty but to several layers of pressure. Class exploitation must therefore not be understood as a mere shortage of money. Control over resources, dependence upon social patronage, fear for one's reputation, and unequal access to a public voice all shape individual decisions. This is why the novel's class question moves beyond private virtue towards criticism of social structure.

9. The Politics of Making Great Men: The Gap Between Prestige and Moral Worth

The title's sharpest edge is directed towards the manufacture of political prestige. A person in public life may become a 'man of the age' through achievement, but may also be glorified through propaganda, group interests, circumstantial popularity, or illusion. Prabhas's novel makes this distinction a subject of inquiry. Private limitations often conflict with public identities; proclamations of greatness cannot therefore be accepted as self-validating.

This critique gives no grounds for treating the novel as a veiled account of a particular political party or the private life of a known historical leader. It does not write the history of explicit party-political events but examines the ethical character of political culture. 'Political' here means more than offices and elections: it concerns who receives public honour, whose voice is heard, and whose experience is granted the status of a central narrative.

10. Karunesh, Raman, and Anand: The Function of a Multi-Character World

Characters such as Karunesh, Raman, and Anand prevent the story from being restricted to one person's perspective. Each person's experience brings the same social reality to light from a different angle. Such differences introduce the movement of contingency and the uncertainty of choices into the novel's world. Merely naming the characters is not enough; one must consider how one character's actions, thoughts, or responses exert a pressure of meaning upon another's situation.

This multiplicity of characters gives the narrative a broad social range, but it also risks limiting the space available for their inward development. Criticism should regard this double condition not as proof of unqualified success but as an artistic trade-off. The novel attempts to accommodate both a character's profound inner life and an extensive social map within a relatively compressed narrative.

11. Rosie: Women's Personhood and Prejudice in Moral Judgement

Rosie is an essential figure in any discussion of the novel's representation of women. Earlier criticism has treated her circumstances under the heading of 'characterlessness'. Modern literary criticism, however, must examine such moral labels themselves. By what standard is a man's behaviour judged in circumstances where a woman's conduct attracts severe social condemnation? The narrator's perspective, the judgements of male characters, and the reader's critical assessment are three different things.

Reducing Rosie to a passive moral emblem obscures her human complexity. The tensions among a woman's desires, social constraints, the politics of respectability, and society's verdict upon her character provide a basis for a serious feminist rereading. Such a rereading does not deny the narrative's

representation; it interrogates the language of value judgement at work within it. The quality of criticism concerning women lies in its ability to distinguish a character's actions from the categories imposed upon her by a patriarchal society.

12. Champa and Shobha: Love, Social Meaning, and Diverse Relationships

The romantic episodes involving Champa and Shobha open another emotional plane within the novel's fraught social world. Love does not become an amusement entirely separate from the story of public exploitation; it allows us to see individuals as desiring human beings beyond their social roles. The contradiction between the tenderness of a relationship and pressures imposed from outside becomes visible to the reader.

In evaluating these episodes, emotional sweetness cannot be taken as sufficient evidence of women's autonomy. How freely can the characters make decisions concerning their own lives? Does love challenge society's boundaries of class and standing, or is it ultimately accommodated within them? The experiences of Champa and Shobha make these questions possible. Their contribution is to save the narrative from lifeless political argument by joining it to the aspirations of private life.

13. Private Desire and Public Power: Two Forms of the Same Crisis

To understand the political criticism in Yugpuruṣ, episodes of love, morality, and social self-interest must be read in relation to one another. Power operates both in the creation of public reputation and in the distribution of respect within private relationships. Someone who controls another person's decisions at home may present himself as generous or ethical on a public platform. Such divided behaviour is a powerful subject for a realist novel.

The work's politics therefore lies not in direct depictions of parliament or government but in unequal control over resources, trust, decisions, and status in everyday relationships. Its social satire grows sharper when the language of greatness begins to conceal injustices in the relationships immediately surrounding it.

14. The Irony of the Title and the Narrative's Critical Reversal

The title leads the reader to anticipate an elevated hero, but the people of the story are incomplete, unstable, and constrained. That discrepancy makes Yugpuruṣ ironic. The higher the designation of greatness, the more disconcerting the questions about its social foundations become. On what grounds does society declare a person important? Who announces the symbolic significance of someone unable to escape the exploitation present in their own life? The novel's ethical energy is concentrated in these questions.

Ratna becomes crucial here because Ratna's experience acts as a negative reflection of the language of greatness. If society uses the image of an oppressed person instead of transforming its injustices, the 'man of the age' is a satire produced by that very order. The novel places this possibility before the reader's judgement.

15. Unexpected Turns in Character Development: The Truth of Life or an Artistic Weakness?

Earlier critics have suggested that the behaviour of the characters begins to change unpredictably after the opening Banaras section. This objection deserves serious attention. Unexpected turns are not inherently unnatural in a social novel; human decisions alter under many pressures. Yet a change must have psychological or social grounds established within the reader's experience if it is to be artistically convincing.

If Shankar's questioning disposition becomes indifference towards rights, how adequately does the narrative explain that shift? This is a valid test of the novel. Nevertheless, the mere fact that a character fails to follow an authorially predetermined heroic path does not prove artistic failure. One strength of realist narrative is its violation of expectations. The problem is not 'unexpectedness' but its narrative justification. Preserving this subtle distinction allows us to assess both the work's achievements and its limitations.

16. Dialogue, Narrator, and the Movement of the Story

Dialogue plays an important role in the novel. Through the characters' direct speech, the reader experiences tensions within social relationships; the narrator's remarks and descriptions provide the background against which those utterances acquire meaning. Were dialogue only a means of conveying information, the story would be linear. Instead, questions, replies, and emotional impulses disclose the uncertainty of the characters' positions.

The initial curiosity of the narrative, the many relationships developed in its middle, and its concentrated satire near the end do not proceed at one uniform pace. The reader's attention travels from one centre to another. Such a pattern is both a natural feature of the multi-character social novel and a risk of plot fragmentation. The decisive question is less 'How many events occurred?' than 'How effectively do relations of meaning connect those events?'

17. Language and the Experience of Maithili Social Reality

A distinctive strength of Prabhas's prose is its readiness to converse with social life. The intimacy and practicality of its language make the characters integral to their contemporary world. Linguistic behaviour varies among the urban culture of Banaras, circumstances of rural poverty, conversations between individuals, and the display of social standing. Narrative tone, forms of address, and intervals of conduct are important to understanding the novel's meaning.

Literary language does not merely imitate everyday speech; it gives shape to the world of experience. When a character attempts to justify himself, his choice of words also performs ideological work. Elevated terms such as title, honour, morality, and 'man of the age' bring their own social pressure. Attending to these value-laden features of language clarifies the connection between the title and the novel's dialogue.

18. Realism: A Sense of Social Causation Deeper Than the Description of Events

To call Yugpuruṣ a realist novel is not merely to say that its characters seem recognisable from ordinary life despite inhabiting a fictional world. More important is the reciprocal influence of personal decisions and social circumstances. Poverty, public reputation, crises of rights, and public glorification become causal links in the plot. Realism is therefore not a copy of experience but a critical recombination of the relations within experience.

From this standpoint, the novel's politics is indirect but by no means insignificant. Even without the apparatus of a direct manifesto, a narrative can criticise society's dominant values. The irony of its title and the insecurity of its characters' lives are the chief instruments of this oblique criticism.

19. Psychology and Social Explanation

Shankar's curiosity and later behaviour, Ratna's helplessness, and the conflicts within other characters' relationships are not merely external facts of society. They are also shaped by human desire, fear, self-justification, and hesitation. To treat social and psychological perspectives as opposites is to miss half the novel's significance. When social arrangements narrow human choices, psychology itself becomes a field affected by social history.

Yet merely mentioning a state of mind does not amount to a full explanation of character. The sequence of decisions, indications of unexpected change, and responses of others should allow readers to infer causes. Critical doubts about Shankar's development are pertinent in this context. Rather than treating them only as a rejection of the work, it is more productive to see them as an invitation to read the novel's psychological structure more closely.

20. The Limits of Comparison with Agyeya's Śekhar: Ek Jīvanī

Shankar's childhood curiosity has been compared with that of Shekhar in Agyeya's Śekhar: Ek Jīvanī. The comparison is useful because the childhood urge to question, the encounter with inherited prohibitions, and the formation of independent consciousness are important concerns of the modern Indian novel. But similarity in one or two childhood traits does not justify assuming that two entire works share the same artistic form or intellectual purpose.

A comparative reading must distinguish Shekhar's internal self-examination in Agyeya's novel from Shankar's function within the multi-character social world of Prabhas's fiction. Yugpuruṣ moves gradually from the inquiry of one consciousness towards wider social irony. Its essential difference lies in that turn. A comparison is valuable not when it simply announces resemblance but when it examines the differences that emerge beyond resemblance.

21. Assessing Earlier Criticism

In Maithili Upanyāsak Samājśāstrīya Dṛṣṭi Adhyayan, Dr Arun Kumar Jha reads Yugpuruṣ as a realist novel critical of the prevailing order. He draws attention to its initial Banaras setting, Shankar's inquisitive childhood, unexpected shifts in character, and Ratna's exploitation under poverty. His analysis also cites Dr Prabhavati Jha's view, which clarifies the importance of exposing the novel's social contradictions. The central contribution of this critical tradition is its search for political truth in social antagonisms rather than the private virtues of a supposed hero.

Nevertheless, some judgements within this tradition require reconsideration. Shankar's changing conduct cannot straightforwardly be taken as proof that the author has lost control of the character; it may also be understood as an effect of historical uncertainty in a person's life. To call Ratna's failure to resist a mere weakness is to underestimate structural subordination under exploitation. Assigning a moral epithet to Rosie risks closing off an independent critical interpretation of the female character. These qualifications do not diminish earlier criticism; they offer an opportunity to extend it from new perspectives.

22. Abhiśapta and Yugpuruṣ: The Expansion of the Author's Social Vision

Reading Abhiśapta alongside Yugpuruṣ reveals both continuity and change in Prabhas's creative outlook. In the first novel, the marriage of Prakash and Meera brings the self-contradictions of the educated middle class and patriarchal inequalities of private life to the forefront. In the second, Shankar's questioning, Ratna's exploitation, and the issue of public greatness extend the scope of social analysis.

Both works are concerned with the distance between individuals and their outward moral claims. In Abhiśapta, the source of the curse is created within life itself; in Yugpuruṣ, a title of greatness collides with the person's actual circumstances. The first title asks about the causes of suffering, the second about the authenticity of prestige. Such a parallel reading makes the social target of the writer's satire clearer without dissolving the independent narrative structures of the two novels.

23. The Principal Achievement: Testing 'Greatness' against Ordinary Life

The chief achievement of Yugpuruṣ is to dispel the enchantment of public glorification. The narrative does not pronounce someone great in isolation from their social surroundings; it tests claims of greatness against economic deprivation, limited options, unequal relationships, and ethical contradictions. The work thereby acquires the capacity to become a wider critique of its age rather than merely an individual life-portrait.

The pathos of a character such as Ratna forms its moral centre. The reader is unsettled by the question of how ironic proclamations of exceptional stature and prestige become in a society that does not distribute opportunity and dignity equally. Here discomfort is not the novel's weakness but its critical success.

24. Artistic Limitations: Fragmentation, Moral Conventions, and Psychological Continuity

A critical appraisal of Prabhas's novel must identify limitations alongside achievements. As the narrative expands from its mysterious Banaras opening into the varied experiences of numerous characters, maintaining unity becomes a challenge. If no adequate psychological bridge emerges between Shankar's questioning sense of rights and his later indifference, the credibility of characterisation may suffer. This doubt should not become outright rejection but should serve as a demanding test of close reading.

Likewise, if the narrative's system of values imposes conventional moral judgements upon women's conduct, the breadth of its social criticism is narrowed. A vision alert to political injustice should be equally sensitive to injustice based on gender. It is also important to clarify the relation between class causes and personal choices when explaining Ratna's oppression. By posing these questions, criticism does not cancel the novel's achievements; it deepens the aesthetic standards by which they are judged.

25. A Contemporary Reading: From Hero Worship to Social Responsibility

Leadership, popularity, and ethical trustworthiness do not always coincide in society. Yugpuruṣ transforms that disjunction into literature. For contemporary readers, the novel's question is not merely how to understand the political culture of the past. It is also how private suffering figures within society's collective experience, on what grounds declarations of prestige are made, and why a critical desire to know can gradually turn into passive acceptance.

The distance between Shankar's curiosity and Ratna's constrained situation remains a difficult problem for social consciousness today. The wish to perceive the truth is not sufficient; resistance needs a collective foundation. The question

of the 'man of the age' thus becomes, ultimately, a question about society's responsibility rather than the glory of a great individual.

26. Conclusion: The Image of the Man of the Age and the Real People of His Time

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary's Yugpuruṣ belongs importantly to that tradition of the modern Maithili social novel which questions the arrangements of an age while recounting individual lives. The mystery of the opening in Banaras, Shankar's inquiry into facts and uncertain journey towards an awareness of rights, the varied social presence of Karunesh, Raman, and Anand, Rosie's relationships and the episodes involving Champa and Shobha, and Ratna's poverty-driven subordination together create an unstable social map.

This map resists the uncomplicated making of a hero. Ratna's situation reminds us that turning an exploited person into a public symbol does not secure that person's actual liberation. Shankar's change shows that progress from curiosity to consciousness and from consciousness to social action is not inevitable. The love episodes disclose the human complexity of social relationships, while the political ironies test public announcements of greatness.

The novel has limitations of a kind that can arise in a polycentric work with a strong social purpose: unexpected movements of character, difficulties of psychological continuity, and narrowness in certain moral classifications. Yet its decisive literary contribution remains intact. Yugpuruṣ asks us to seek the measure of genuine greatness not in an individual's standing but in social justice, self-knowledge, and the dignity of people whose lives are constrained. In this sense the novel is not merely the story of a 'man of the age', but a sustained interrogation of the value system of his time.

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SECTION ONE · NOVELS / REVIEW 3

3. Hamrā Lag Rahab? ('Will You Stay with Me?'): A Sociological Narrative of Feudal Power, Women's Existence, and Pranav's Moral Inaction

A Critical Study of the Novel by Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary

Abstract

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary's Hamrā Lag Rahab? represents a realist tendency in the Maithili novel in which individual lives take shape amid the contradictions of social power, class inequality, and gendered exploitation. Pranav stands at the work's centre, but he is neither a triumphant nor an unblemished hero in the conventional sense. He recognises the marks of feudal culture and knows the suffering of people close to him, yet a distance persists between his moral response and his social conduct. Kallu Chaudhary's feudal presence, Munesar's dependent position, Madhu's life under political patronage, the world of the maternal uncle and aunt, and Sheela's complex personality disclose different dimensions of exploitation. Love, hatred, revenge, self-sacrifice, self-respect, and attraction are interwoven. The novel's two-part structure, dialogue-led narration, temporal markers, and ensemble of characters enlarge the range of social experience. The title's interrogative form reveals not merely a longing for closeness and shelter but also the power and uncertainty within such shelter. This review examines the novel's sociohistorical meanings, characterisation, the autonomy of its female characters, psychological artistry, ethical conflicts, and limitations of earlier criticism. Its central conclusion is that the novel turns the distance between witnessing exploitation and resisting it into a test of the reader's own conscience.

Keywords: Hamrā Lag Rahab?; Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary; Maithili novel; Pranav; Sheela; feudalism; gendered exploitation; psychological realism; political patronage; social consciousness.

1. Introduction: The Question Contained in the Title

'Will you stay with me?' Two distinct notes, attraction and insecurity, sound together in this brief question. The Maithili word lag denotes a location but also a relationship. Wanting someone to remain near may express love, trust, intimacy, and companionship; yet behind this wish may lie a need for refuge, fear of abandonment, dependence, or a desire for possession. The question mark prevents the utterance from becoming either a command or an assurance; it preserves its uncertainty.

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary places that uncertainty within a wider social world. Those who remain close do not invariably offer protection; a relationship described as one's own can become a means of exploitation. Familial refuge,

political patronage, sexual attraction, and feudal domination intersect here. The title is therefore not simply a declaration of romantic feeling but a social and ethical question: whose closeness is safe, upon whose power does a relationship depend, and whose desire is free to decide whether to stay or leave?

2. The Novel's Place: An Enlargement of Realism in Maithili Fiction

Hamrā Lag Rahab? is the third of Prabhas's five novels. It was published independently in 1977 by the Maithili Academy, Patna, and subsequently incorporated into the novels volume of Prabhās Samagra, edited by Dr Vandana Chaudhary. This publishing history matters because the book deserves to be read as a distinct literary work rather than merely sharing the collective prestige of five novels. Its social questions arise from the realities of its historical moment, but its critical energy is not confined to that period.

The fragmentation of rural life, social inequality, regulation by inherited conventions, and women's constrained circumstances have long figured in the Maithili novel. Prabhas connects these concerns as competing relationships within a whole society. Moving beyond the educated family's pride in Abhiśapta and the political glorification interrogated in Yugpuruṣ, Hamrā Lag Rahab? examines the intricate connections between bodily existence, desire, class-based security, and social patronage. Realism here is not the imitation of events but an inquiry into the causes of unequal social relationships.

3. Narrative Design: Two Parts and a Many-Sided Social World

The work unfolds in two parts. To regard this division only as a matter of printed arrangement would obscure its implications. The story advances through the experiences of several characters, while its settings, relationships, and social circumstances change from time to time. Ties established in the first part direct the later movement of the story; the second part places social and personal tensions on another plane. Instead of presenting the uninterrupted life history of one hero, the design makes a number of voices from the surrounding world active.

This multiplicity of characters does not immediately present the reader with a single moral verdict. Although Pranav's perspective matters, not every event extends his private desires. The presence of Kallu Chaudhary, Munesar, Madhu, Sheela, the maternal uncle and aunt, and others makes clear that social reality cannot be exhausted by any one person's autobiography. The work's strength lies in this extension of experience; its formal challenge is to hold the characters' relationships together through convincing chains of cause and effect.

4. Pranav: Heroism Put to an Ethical Test

Pranav is first distinguishable as a witness to exploitation. He is not ignorant of social injustice. Remnants of feudalism, the hardships of those around him, and

forms of economic and social dependence are before his eyes. Yet seeing, understanding, and opposing are three different stages. The novel's critical tension arises because Pranav's observation does not automatically develop into moral courage. Popular expectations of heroism suggest that a character who witnesses injustice will become a rebel; Prabhas brings that expectation up against a less comfortable reality.

In assessing this protagonist, his inner motives, attraction to relationships, and search for comfort must be read separately. Earlier criticism has suggested that desire influences Pranav's actions. Yet 'desire' should not become the sole instrument of moral accusation. The question is how private wishes push an awareness of social justice into the background. Pranav sees suffering, but at times chooses closeness and self-preservation rather than effective action against his circumstances. He thereby becomes a question mark against the very designation of 'hero'.

5. Witness versus Resister: The Novel's Central Conflict

A social order remains most secure when even those who know about injustice refuse to risk opposing it. Pranav's position gives imaginative form to this social truth. The scenes he witnesses could change history only if experience produced a social judgment, and judgment in turn produced action. Personal interest, fear, attraction, and the expectation of shelter can obstruct this transition. The novel asks why an awareness of injustice does not automatically become social consciousness.

It would also be too easy to describe Pranav's inaction entirely as a defect of character. Resistance in a feudal society carries a real price. Economic dependence, fear of losing social standing, and the pressures of relationships can constrain an individual. Nevertheless, recognition of these structural constraints does not cancel social responsibility. A serious reading must preserve both sides: circumstances restrict a person, while decisions taken within those restrictions either sustain or challenge the prevailing order.

6. Kallu Chaudhary: Feudal Power as an Institutional Relationship

Kallu Chaudhary appears as an important emblem of feudal domination. If feudalism is understood only as the old zamindari system's legal condition, the complexity of its surviving social forms remains obscure. Land, property, familial ascendancy, protection by powerful persons, and pressure upon the choices of the vulnerable can all form part of the structure of power. The novel criticises feudal culture in this broader sense.

Kallu Chaudhary's presence compels reflection on how inequality survives in everyday conduct even after formal equality has been instituted. When power becomes not merely an authority issuing orders but the unavoidable medium of relationships, the freedom of weaker individuals contracts in ways that are not

immediately visible. The feudal lord here is not only a person; he represents a social structure in which even intimacy is not free of domination.

7. Munesar: The Exploited Individual's Fate and Political Visibility

Munesar's character especially raises the question of lower-class dependence. Earlier critics have compared him with Ratna in Yugpuruṣ. The value of the comparison lies not simply in resemblance between forms of suffering, but in understanding the structures that distribute social opportunity unequally. For those without resources, community pressure, the search for employment, and limited access to recognition profoundly affect their choices.

To regard Munesar merely as an object of pity would diminish the novel's social meaning. The questions are which social relationships produce subordination, how it reproduces itself, and how much capacity for decision remains when just alternatives are absent. From this perspective, Munesar's circumstances are also an ethical test of Pranav's experience: do those who witness exploitation make another person's suffering a reason to change themselves, or do they leave it behind as a memory?

8. Madhu: The Contradictory Relationship between Protection and Exploitation

Madhu's situation offers an opportunity to understand the intersection of political patronage and women's insecurity. On its surface, 'protection' denotes safety and assistance. When social power is unequal, however, such a relationship can become a vehicle for entitlement, burdensome indebtedness, control, or exploitation. Madhu must be considered within this contradiction. Her vulnerable social position may prevent her from governing her own decisions, even when outsiders describe her circumstances as secure.

Criticism of Madhu's experience must avoid turning her suffering into exciting plot material. The success of the writer's social intention should be judged by the space Madhu's personality receives for desire, refusal, fear, and possible resistance. The exploitation of women does not arise only from a villain's wickedness; the unequal distribution of public standing and personal rights is another principal cause.

9. The Maternal Uncle and Aunt: Inequality within the Institution of Intimacy

The world of the maternal uncle and aunt draws the story from larger feudal and political structures into familial relations. Kinship is conventionally expected to provide social security. Yet authority, resources, shelter, and emotional duties are not distributed equally within families. The outward name of intimacy, therefore, does not always remove actual insecurity. These domestic episodes matter to the novel's wider social concerns.

Criticising the family does not mean devaluing every familial bond. The real question is whether a relationship grants its members dignity and the right of independent decision, or increases their dependence. This ethical weighing returns repeatedly in Pranav's experience. The title Hamrā Lag Rahab? acquires renewed significance here: in whose company does staying mean security, and in whose company does it mean a loss of self-determination?

10. Sheela: A Complex Character of Desire, Constraint, and Contradiction

Sheela is among the novel's most thought-provoking women. Her character cannot be reduced to an object of attraction. Love and hatred, self-sacrifice and self-respect, revenge and affection—such opposed experiences may coexist within a single person. Because of these psychological layers, Sheela escapes the stereotyped image of either a consistently virtuous or a fallen woman.

The appropriate way to read Sheela is to examine the moral significance of her responses independently of the male protagonist's happiness or suffering. If her anger is treated only as excess, her desire only as temptation, and her self-respect only as an impediment, the novel's depth disappears. Sheela's conflicting emotions do not cancel one another; they reveal the extent to which unjust social relations complicate a person's understanding of herself.

11. Love and Hatred: A Shared Ground of Psychological Experience

To regard love and hatred as always complete opposites is psychologically inadequate. When love becomes entangled with injury to the self, rejection, or betrayal, the memory of attraction and a desire for revenge can be active at once. The episodes involving Sheela open imaginative possibilities within this complex condition. Rather than assigning her feelings one fixed name, the reader is invited to investigate their causes.

Such forms of love do not arise in a social vacuum. Class, standing, masculine entitlement, and women's insecurity shape relationships. If a woman is emotionally independent but must nevertheless seek external protection, judging her choices requires both compassion and social understanding. This is why separating the inner life from society in an analysis of Sheela would miss the essence of the work.

12. Self-Sacrifice, Self-Respect, and Revenge: Three Ethical Positions of a Female Character

Criticism of Sheela refers to self-sacrifice, self-respect, and revenge. These three feelings do not occupy the same ethical plane. Sacrifice can be a freely chosen expression of love, but it can also be an unequal compromise accepted under social pressure. Self-respect is indispensable to self-determination; revenge may

grow from the memory of injustice, but its moral consequences depend on the circumstances.

Serious literary criticism does not dismiss these feelings as evidence of a woman's emotional instability. It asks instead what routes remain for protecting self-respect when a character's resources, social support, and alternatives are limited. Sheela's complexity is an achievement of the author's psychological attentiveness. A complete evaluation must also ask whether the narrative's moral perspective treats her as an independent human agent or subordinates her to the emotional destiny of its male characters.

13. Women's Bodies and Social Power

Across the novel's different situations of women, one question repeatedly emerges: where does the claim to control a woman's body originate? Family, feudal prestige, wealth, political patronage, and an asserted right in the name of love all interfere with women's decisions. Such interference brings more than personal humiliation; a person can lose her social standing, confidence, and even prospects for the future.

It is not enough to accept scenes of exploitation merely because they are described as realistic. Their artistic force depends on establishing a deep connection among the causes of violence, the injured person's experience, and the reader's moral response. A woman's suffering should be a subject of history and experience in its own right, not only a device for awakening a male protagonist's conscience. The novel's achievements and limitations particularly need examination by this criterion.

14. Feudal Survivals and Modern Political Patronage

The novel points to a significant sociohistorical transition: even after the supposed end of older feudal influence, its practical power can persist in new political relationships. Older systems of wealth, status, fear, and family prestige make alliances with new arrangements of patronage. Feudalism and modern politics are therefore not invariably antagonists belonging to separate historical periods.

Seen in this light, Kallu Chaudhary's feudal position and Madhu's circumstances under political patronage are not unrelated episodes. Power changes the forms through which it claims legitimacy, while the tendency to exploit may remain stable. The sociological depth of the novel lies here: moving beyond criticism of individual misconduct to perceive a network sustained both by those who benefit and by those who silently observe.

15. Village and City: Two Settings, a Shared Inequality

Both village and city form part of Pranav's life story. Feudal pressure, kinship structures, and local systems of prestige operate in the village; in the city arise

expectations of modern opportunity, new relationships, and political contacts. Yet the mere presence of an urban setting does not guarantee social liberation. Urban relationships, too, may frequently be governed by new forms of attraction, self-interest, and domination.

The opposition between village and city cannot therefore be reduced to the simple formula of civilisation versus backwardness. Even when characters move to a different social environment, they carry memories of inherited attitudes, fears, and desires. The question is not which place is naturally superior, but when a particular social order enlarges individual freedom and when it binds that freedom through new forms of discipline.

16. Indications of Time and the Political Meaning of Memory

Explicit temporal indications and the characters' recollections of their past prevent the narration from becoming a mere chronological list of events. Present choices are affected by earlier experience. Memories of exploitation, family wounds, and past attractions alter the meaning of later events. From a temporal distance the reader sees that remembrance does not guarantee a just decision: after witnessing and understanding much, a person may still develop a convenient tendency to forget.

Pranav's movement away from the past and towards present opportunities is one expression of this crisis of memory. The question is whether experience becomes a form of social judgment or remains material for a private autobiography. The literary purpose of temporal markers is fulfilled when they enable readers to compare a character's earlier position with the ethical meaning of his present decisions.

17. The Sociolinguistic Function of Dialogue

Through dialogue Hamrā Lag Rahab? constructs both social closeness and distance. Insistence, coaxing, pressure, hesitation, resistance, and distrust emerge in the characters' speech. The novelist's language transforms the social setting from inert description into living exchange. The tone of address reveals the balance of power in a relationship: who is entitled to ask questions, who must answer, and who remains silent.

At the sociolinguistic level, the importance of dialogue is that the same sentence may convey intimacy within one relationship and control within another. The title's question can be reread accordingly: without knowing the speaker's position, the listener's autonomy, and the social distance between them, its ethical meaning cannot be fixed. Successful dialogue involves not only natural speech but also the visibility it gives these underlying power relations.

18. Multiple Characters: A Social Canvas and a Formal Risk

The different social positions of Kallu Chaudhary, Munesar, Madhu, Sheela, the maternal uncle and aunt, and Pranav create an expansive fictional world. This method allows the novel to present class, gender, and prestige within a single structure. No one character stands for the whole society; each person's experience intersects with another's fate to produce a broader picture of social reality.

Yet the presence of numerous characters is not by itself evidence of artistic completeness. Their independent interior lives and the causal links among events must remain intelligible. If scenes of exploitation are merely added one after another, the work risks becoming a sociological inventory. This is a useful test for Prabhas's novel: how far do its social situations become narratively indispensable to one another, and how far do they remain separate episodes?

19. Pranav and Sheela: The Question of Closeness within Unequal Power Relations

The relationship between Pranav and Sheela is a subtle centre of critical inquiry. Whom does one person truly see, and whom does he avoid seeing? These questions matter more than attraction alone. If Pranav privileges private desire over social judgment, there is a danger that Sheela's life will be turned into a narrative of his own feelings. Her self-respect and impulses of resistance, however, can stand against this one-sided vision.

Nor would it be true to assume that both characters are equally powerless or equally autonomous. Society imposes unequal controls upon women and men. Ethical evaluation of their relationship therefore requires a distinction between individual wishes and social rights. The novel makes this distinction available through experience, whether or not its characters always understand it explicitly.

20. Psychoanalysis and Social Realism: Complementary Perspectives

The novel's psychological dimension should not be treated as a rival to sociological interpretation. Sheela's experiences do not arise solely from personal temperament; social inequality gives them a particular form. Pranav's inactivity also connects personal hesitation with the social attractions of comfort. Self-respect, fear, love, and revenge take on different meanings within unequal structures of power.

From this standpoint, psychological analysis becomes a means of reading the impress of external society upon inner life. Merely describing emotional fluctuations, however, is insufficient; the narrative must also make the formation and alteration of emotions credible. A critic should measure the vitality of characters separately from the appeal of the ethical argument advanced through them.

21. In Dialogue with Dr Durganath Jha 'Shreesh'

Dr Durganath Jha 'Shreesh' has drawn attention to the extensive depiction of women's exploitation in this novel and recognised the artistic significance of the coexistence of constraint, love, hatred, self-respect, self-sacrifice, and revenge in Sheela's character. His assessment helps us understand the novel's psychological achievement. It allows Sheela to be read neither as an uncomplicated example of virtue nor as a symbol of depravity, but as a complex human being inhabited by contrary tendencies.

At the same time, his objection to the broad depiction of immorality in relationships between men and women deserves serious consideration. Where does exaggeration begin in the depiction of a violent society marked by sexual exploitation? If many characters represent the same moral failing, their variety may diminish. Yet such concentration may also be a literary strategy for making the structural extent of exploitation visible. Criticism must therefore weigh both possibilities carefully.

22. Dr Prabhavati Jha's Perspective: Pranav's Psychological Inconsistency

Dr Prabhavati Jha's criticism considers Pranav's life story together with village and urban politics and the contradictions of his mind. Questions arise concerning artificiality in the character and theatricality in the events. This judgment is significant because the social purpose of a novel cannot substitute for the psychological credibility of its characters. If the author wishes to present a hero devoted to justice while his actions repeatedly move in the opposite direction, the reader will demand an explanation of the character's coherence.

Pranav's moral incompleteness, however, is not automatically an artistic failure on the author's part. It is entirely possible for a character to recognise the truth and remain enslaved by desire. The decisive question is whether the novel employs this failing as conscious irony or asks the reader to accept the character as an ideal. Here more than anywhere, criticism must distinguish the character's behaviour from the narrator's judgments of value.

23. Sudhanshu Shekhar Chaudhary's Comparative Objection

While considering Prabhas's novel Navārambha, Sudhanshu Shekhar Chaudhary raised the question of Pranav's artificial heroism in Hamrā Lag Rahab?. This comparison points to a problem in constructing idealistic figures across the author's novels. If unequal pressures within the story destabilise Pranav's personality, language associating him with a kind of 'divinity' necessarily becomes suspect.

This objection must be evaluated at two levels. First, does the text actually make Pranav a supreme ethical model? Second, if it attempts this, do the unfolding events confirm or challenge the claim? Clarifying this distinction is essential. A

socially imperfect person may be the protagonist of an important novel. The problem is not the imperfection itself but the incongruous reconciliation of that imperfection with narrative glorification.

24. Social Obscenity and the Limits of Literary Realism

Depictions of sexual violence and the exploitation of women have long been subjected to conventional moral judgments about 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' literature. Such judgments often attend more closely to the reader's sense of propriety than to the historical reality of suffering in the text. At the opposite extreme, however, no depiction of violence acquires automatic artistic legitimacy merely by being called realistic.

The test should be whether a scene brings out the injured person's dignity, the social sources of suffering, and a critique of injustice, or merely seeks sensation. Hamrā Lag Rahab? invites such questions because its fictional world contains many forms of exploitation directed against women. The representation of difficult social reality becomes literature when an event is transformed into the ethical complexity of lived experience.

25. Connections with Abhiśapta and Yugpuruṣ

Reading Prabhas's first three novels together shows a gradual enlargement of his creative concerns. Abhiśapta chiefly addresses family pride and the self-contradictions of the educated middle class. Yugpuruṣ foregrounds class constraint and the irony of public glorification. Hamrā Lag Rahab? concentrates on the layered relations among feudal survivals, private attraction, political patronage, and women's social insecurity. Across all three runs the shared theme of a distance between professed ethics and actual conduct.

It would nevertheless be mistaken to regard these novels as three repetitions of the same work. The domestic tragedy of Abhiśapta, the political satire of Yugpuruṣ, and the gendered social structures of Hamrā Lag Rahab? have different artistic purposes. Their differences make the development of Prabhas's creative practice discernible. The author does more than condemn individuals: he exposes forms of social conditioning that are repeatedly reproduced within new relationships.

26. The Novel's Meaning for Contemporary Maithili Readers

The social world of Hamrā Lag Rahab? belongs to a particular historical period, but its questions remain meaningful today. On whose control does a woman's safety depend? Does the 'protection' offered by family and politics expand freedom or diminish it? Why does an educated person, even after recognising the truth of exploitation, remain silent for personal convenience? These questions recur at many levels of contemporary life.

Readers should not approach the novel in order to imitate its hero uncritically; their responsibility is to examine his moral choices. To understand Pranav's perspective while questioning his inaction, to read Sheela as an independent human being rather than an object of attraction, and to connect Madhu's and Munesar's circumstances with structural injustice—through these acts, the novel's social criticism enters into dialogue with the present.

27. Conclusion: From the Appeal for Closeness to the Right to Dignity

Hamrā Lag Rahab? is an important, questioning work within the tradition of social realism in the modern Maithili novel. The intimate question of its title reveals, through the developing story, the complex ties between entitlement and refuge. Pranav's knowledge of exploitation and weakness in resisting it, Kallu Chaudhary's feudal presence, Munesar's social constraints, Madhu's insecurity under patronage, the domestic setting of the maternal uncle and aunt, and Sheela's psychological many-sidedness combine to create a world in which closeness no longer necessarily means either safety or justice.

The novel's achievement is to bring women's suffering and the relationship between individual lives and social power into the fictional world. The coexistence of love, hatred, self-respect, and revenge gives Sheela greater artistic complexity; Pranav's indecision exposes the limits of professed public concern for justice. At the same time, the psychological credibility of its characters, the artistic balance of scenes of exploitation, and the inconsistencies of idealised heroism continue to require critical examination.

The heart of the work lies in a simple but difficult distinction: the right to stay with someone is not the same as a claim to rule over that person's life. Trust becomes humane only where freedom, equality, and respect are present. Prabhas's novel alerts readers to this difference. That is why Hamrā Lag Rahab? exceeds the limits of its intimate form of address and becomes an extended question about the moral structure of society.

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SECTION ONE · NOVELS / REVIEW 4

4. Navārambha ('A New Beginning'): The Dissolution of Feudal Glory, Ravi's Moral Contradictions, and the Rebirth of Dalit Consciousness

An Extended Critical Study of the Novel by Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary

Abstract

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary's Navārambha is a significant work in the social-realist tradition of Maithili fiction. It treats the historical decline of feudal supremacy, the corrupt social practices arising on its remnants, and the emergence of new consciousness within the Dalit community as successive stages of one narrative process. Its three parts—Havelī Mohanpur, Laṅkā Mohanpur, and Navārambha—trace a transformation of values as well as of narrative time. Shrikant Chaudhary guards the older feudal code, while figures such as Ekwali Chaudhary, Harishchandra Mishra, and Mahesh Master disclose opportunistic forms of the altered structure of power. Ravi initially raises expectations as a possible agent of a new social life, but his feudal conditioning, his sexual violence against Kavita, his flight, his conflicts over property, and the relationship subsequently marked by remorse complicate his claim to heroism. For literary study, this contradiction is decisive: how far can the person who repeats an older injustice bring about the hoped-for new beginning? The review examines the novel's three-part structure, the distribution of power in the village, the intersections of class and caste, women's autonomy, the limitations of reformism, the political significance of Dalit consciousness, and earlier critical appraisals. Its achievement may be seen in turning change from a matter of an individual's good intentions into a question of historical responsibility and collective resistance.

Keywords: Navārambha; Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary; Havelī Mohanpur; Laṅkā Mohanpur; Ravi; Kavita; feudalism; Dalit consciousness; village politics; social realism.

Source Basis of the Study

The narrative facts discussed in this essay have been drawn from available published critical studies and literary commentaries. Since a direct examination of the novel's complete original text was not possible, no unverified dialogue, additional incident, or quotation from that text is supplied. Within this limitation, the essay offers an independent critical rereading of the three-part narrative design, the characters' social functions, and the work's intellectual possibilities.

1. Introduction: What Constitutes a Beginning?

The title Navārambha awakens hope for the future, yet a new beginning means more than altering the outer appearance of an older structure. When the dominance of one social class breaks down, a just public order does not automatically take its place. Even after the end of older wealth-based power, its habits, unequal relationships, and techniques of advantage may be absorbed into new concentrations of power. Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary makes this complex historical transition the foundation of his novel.

An unspoken question always accompanies the words 'new' and 'beginning' in the title: new for whom? The feudal successor, the opportunistic intermediary of power, women, and the Dalit community cannot necessarily understand the beginning in the same terms. The work therefore exceeds a melancholy story of a dynasty's fall and asks which class will become the subject of history and who will benefit from change.

2. Three-Part Design: Rise, Decline, and Renewal

The novel develops in three parts, entitled Havelī Mohanpur, Laṅkā Mohanpur, and Navārambha. This tripartite plan makes its historical argument visible. In the first part, the foundations of feudal prestige and the crisis of its disintegration become central; the second centres on social wrongdoing born from the remains of the older order; the third turns toward the possibility of a newly awakened consciousness among an overlooked community. It would be mistaken to interpret this movement mechanically as 'good past—bad present—bright future'. The supposed glory of the feudal past itself rested upon domination and deprivation.

The three sections suggest different ethical languages for successive times. The haveli may be remembered as a prestigious institution; Laṅkā functions as a metaphor suggesting luxury, deceit, and destruction; Navārambha asserts a claim about the future. These are not merely differences of nomenclature but stages in the novel's arrangement of feeling and value. Reading one section apart from the others obscures the ethical irony of the transition.

3. 'Havelī Mohanpur': A Historical Examination of Feudal 'Glory'

The haveli of the first part can be understood both as an architectural sign of feudal grandeur and as a centre of social hierarchy. Its physical scale, prestige, and sense of traditional entitlement distinguish it from the homes of equal citizens. The very use of 'glory' for the older feudal world poses an ethical problem: whose experience made something count as glorious?

Shrikant Chaudhary's role is important here. He appears as the guardian of an older code of propriety and feudal assumptions. Guardianship by itself is no certificate of moral superiority. The institutional foundations of what is being defended—wealth, dependent classes, caste domination, and inheritance—also

require scrutiny. A meaningful reading of Havelī Mohanpur recognises the social causes and intellectual implications of the old order's end rather than merely mourning it.

4. Shrikant Chaudhary: Guardian of Tradition and Embattled Authority

To place Shrikant Chaudhary in either of the simple categories of a 'good man' or an 'evil feudal lord' would obscure his historical function. He represents a system of values in which lineage, propriety, and command exercised authority over social conduct. Its dissolution feels like personal humiliation because an individual is unable to separate his identity from institutional dominance.

An effective feature of the novel is its presentation of personal insecurity alongside feudal decline. Yet there is also a danger that sympathy may be distributed unevenly. Readers may grieve for Shrikant's downfall without thereby being required to endorse the injustices of the old society. Compassion for a human being and criticism of an unjust institution are not mutually exclusive. Maintaining this distinction is particularly necessary in evaluating this section.

5. Feudal Decline: Economic Impoverishment or an Ethical Crisis?

When the economic foundation of the feudal class breaks down, its social ascendancy becomes unstable. But feudalism is more than a property relationship: it permeates conduct, memory, bodies, forms of address, and the language of self-respect. Even after its economic decline, many people continue to sustain it mentally. The work offers an opportunity to recognise this uneven pace of historical change.

In realist criticism, 'decline' means more than the loss of resources; it also signifies the erosion of social legitimacy. A society that once gave certain people authority by birth begins, under new economic and political conditions, to question that authority's justification. Even so, the change is not certain to result in collective justice. The world of Laṅkā Mohanpur emerges from this uncertainty.

6. 'Laṅkā Mohanpur': New Exploitation upon the Remains of Collapse

The word 'Laṅkā' in the second part's title itself evokes cultural associations of luxury, immense power, and destruction. These resonances move the story away from the old haveli's memory and towards the workings of new opportunistic relationships. After older prestige breaks down, new groups pursuing advantage begin to occupy the space rather than leave a vacuum. The social balance of power shifts, but equality may remain distant from the lives of the exploited.

Characters such as Ekwali Chaudhary, Harishchandra Mishra, and Mahesh Master signal different aspects of the changed culture. If they are treated only as examples of personal hypocrisy or moral bankruptcy, the collective force of the novel's criticism is weakened. What matters is how educated people, influential figures, and those with access to resources assume the place of an older dominance within new social spaces. The formal disappearance of feudal titles does not prove that social equality has arrived.

7. Ekwali Chaudhary, Harishchandra Mishra, and Mahesh Master: Intermediaries in the Transfer of Power

These characters matter critically because, through them, social power is seen passing not only from one individual to another but also from one manner of life to another. Ekwali Chaudhary's name echoes the older ascendancy; Harishchandra Mishra and Mahesh Master point to different recognisable social roles. Even when names, professions, or outward conventions change, the logic of taking unfair advantage can remain intact.

Their assessment must preserve the distinction between direct textual evidence and critical inference. Rather than retelling every act of each character, it is more productive here to consider their collective structural role: which class becomes an intermediary in profiting from new forms of exploitation, and which class's labour and rights disappear from view? Thus the novel moves from the faults of individuals to questions about a social system.

8. Ravi's Arrival: The Desire for Change and Its Contradictions

Ravi emerges as a possible bearer of new consciousness. The story creates an expectation that he will understand the limitations of both feudal decline and the opportunistic new order and seek a just social alternative. His contradictions, however, seriously challenge this expectation. Despite his claim or wish to be liberated from inherited habits, his own conduct reproduces their violent forms.

Through Ravi, the novel moves beyond an easy conception of the reformist hero. Someone fluent in opposing injustice may himself commit it; someone who praises social change may exercise feudal masculine entitlement in private life. Literarily this contradiction matters greatly, because it enables readers to discern the distance between profession and practice. The novel must also meet a stringent test here: does it genuinely acknowledge Ravi's wrongdoing as wrongdoing, or dissolve it into the promise of his future greatness?

9. Kavita: The Independent Moral Existence of a Woman Subjected to Violence

The relationship between Ravi and Kavita is the novel's most difficult and decisive matter. Ravi's rape of Kavita cannot be minimised as a 'mistake in love', a 'youthful lapse', or an 'inevitable outcome of feudal upbringing'. Social

conditioning can clarify the historical background of violence but cannot erase moral responsibility for the act. Without maintaining this distinction, a serious evaluation of the novel's representation of women is impossible.

Kavita should not exist in the novel merely as an instrument of Ravi's atonement. Her loss, fear, resistance, decisions, and future are themselves matters of literary importance. If the story gives her more room as an opportunity for the hero's self-purification than as an independent person, this constitutes an artistic limitation. A sociological review must ask how much autonomy Kavita's experience receives within the narrative. A social critique of violence against women is complete only when women's voices, justice, and reconstruction stand at its centre.

10. Sexual Violence and Feudal Masculinity

Earlier social studies connect Ravi's violence with feudal conditioning. The explanation matters: feudal power rests not only upon control of land and wealth but also upon a mentality that claims ownership of women's bodies. Such conditioning trains individuals to disregard the wishes of others. The formal economic demise of feudalism does not automatically eliminate this form of masculinity.

Yet identifying a social cause must not become a means of reducing the act's legal or ethical seriousness. If critics explain only Ravi's social training, Kavita's suffering recedes into the background. A sound analysis must account for both causation and responsibility. This tension becomes the measure of Navārambha's entire discourse of new consciousness: how can a change that does not respect a woman's consent and dignity properly be described as a new social era?

11. Flight: Failure of Courage or a Strategy of Self-Preservation?

The episode in which Ravi leaves the village after his violence against Kavita sharpens the social and ethical problem. Flight can remove a person from immediate accountability, but it does not abolish the past. Ravi's distance from the village is not reliable evidence of any transformation of his inherited attitudes; nor is it a substitute for acknowledging or remedying his wrongdoing.

By the time Ravi returns, the village's circumstances have changed. The intervening time matters. Society does not stand still awaiting an individual; relationships of power continue to move at their own pace. Because events have unfolded during Ravi's absence, he forfeits any unquestioned claim to be the centre of life around him. The story thus challenges the false masculine self-confidence associated with conventional heroism.

12. Return and the Question of Property: The Peculiarity of Entitlement

Critical accounts mention plans to usurp Ravi's property after his return. This episode reveals a tension between the inheritance-based identity of the old feudal society and changing relationships of power. Property rights may appear to be a purely personal matter, but in a rural social order they bear upon the distribution of resources, the position of labourers, and control over the community.

If Ravi remains indifferent to the defence of his rights, the indifference may be interpreted either as ethical generosity or as indecision. Renouncing property does not invariably serve social justice: whose hands the property will pass into, how it will be used, and what will become of dependent groups may all remain unanswered. The literary protagonist should be evaluated here by the social consequences of his choices, not by the ornament of personal renunciation.

13. Reformist Declarations and the Real Possibility of Change

Ravi is reported to speak of social exploitation, revolution, and village reform, but his conduct does not consistently match those declarations. This inconsistency is a critical centre of the novel. If reform rests only upon the good intentions of well-meaning individuals, the sources of exploitation embedded in social structures are difficult to change. A new society requires the redistribution of rights, the community's participation in decision-making, and organisation capable of challenging established power.

'Changing the map of the village' is an attractive promise, but it should mean more than constructing roads or buildings. If caste hierarchies, women's social safety, the value of labour, and questions of representation remain untouched, older oppression can continue under a new appearance. Ravi's reformist language seems incomplete by this test. The novel's critical significance lies in making that incompleteness visible.

14. The Longevity of Feudal Conditioning: Individuals Change, Relationships Do Not

The word saṃskār, meaning inherited habits and conditioning, is important in the sociological interpretation of Navārambha. Society is not merely the sum of laws, land arrangements, or political offices; its continuity is embedded in conduct, expectations, fears, and moral reasoning. Even after the formal weakening of feudal institutions, Ravi's sense of masculine entitlement, unstable conduct regarding property, and paternalistic language of reform suggest the survival of older habits.

The novel's real transformation therefore cannot consist only of Shrikant's diminished power. The essential question is whether Ravi and his social class can establish an intellectual and psychological distance from the old inequality.

Without evidence of that distance in matters of caste and gender, any proclamation of a new beginning remains unconvincing.

15. Dalit Consciousness: The Ethical Centre of the Third Part

Earlier criticism has particularly emphasised the emergence of a new consciousness and an awareness of the Dalit community's condition in the third part. This is not merely a means of making the story more poignant by introducing neglected characters. Questions of self-respect, social rights, and collective awareness in opposition to caste hierarchy give a new foundation to the novel's wider vision of change. The dissolution of feudal 'glory' can be called historical progress only when those excluded by that order gain the right to shape their own future.

This third part matters greatly because it separates the claim of a new beginning from Ravi's personal moral cleansing. If an excluded social group becomes an active historical agent in its own right, the agent of change is no longer simply a feudal heir but a collective community. Seen in this way, the three-part structure can develop beyond a hero's biography into an account of transforming relationships of power.

16. Dalit Sensibility and Dalit Political Agency: A Necessary Distinction

Compassion for Dalit lives and recognition of Dalit people as decisive agents are two distinct literary acts. Compassionate representation may communicate the intensity of suffering, but social justice remains incomplete unless the oppressed are recognised as decision-makers themselves. It is therefore essential, in studying the third part of Navārambha, to ask whether its Dalit characters themselves raise questions, make decisions, and participate in collective action.

Earlier critics identify an emergence of 'Dalit new consciousness'. That observation can be deepened by asking whether this consciousness signifies only moral awakening or also new claims to resources, respect, and political participation. The transformative force of a social novel is more pronounced on the latter plane. Dalit discourse here is not a theory imposed from outside; it arises from the development of meaning across the work's three sections.

17. Reconsidering 'Rise–Decline–Renewal' Critically

The established practice of reading the novel's three parts as a sequence of rise, decline, and renewal is useful, but the meanings of these terms are not critically fixed. The rise of the first stage belongs to the feudal class, not to society as a whole. The second stage's decline is more than the loss of dignity of an old family; it also includes the emergence of new opportunism. If the renewal of the third part centres upon the Dalit community, it exposes the ethical limitations of both preceding stages.

The narrative sequence therefore becomes not a celebration of linear progress but a reorganisation of social evaluation. A past that was a golden age for one group may have been an age of exploitation for another. A present that signifies destruction for the old elite may open possibilities for an excluded class. The future 'new beginning' consequently demands a foundation in shared social justice rather than in the memory of any one class.

18. Kavita and Ravi: A Relationship of Remorse Rather Than Love

The final relationship between Ravi and Kavita cannot be regarded as a straightforward romantic reunion. The available critical accounts describe it as connected with remorse. The ethical significance of this distinction is substantial. Regret may be a possible beginning of consciousness of wrongdoing, but it does not automatically provide restitution for the injured person or secure her consent. The distinction calls into question the possibility of an uncomplicated romantic ending to the work.

After violence against a woman, the idea of 'forgiveness' must also be handled carefully in any discussion of a relationship's restoration. Forgiveness is a decision belonging solely to the injured person, in the exercise of her own freedom. If the story makes the man's remorse its principal achievement, the woman's experience risks becoming secondary. Conversely, an awareness of the profound fracture within the relationship can help readers understand violence's irreversible consequences. The deeper significance of the Ravi–Kavita relationship emerges from this ethical tension.

19. Ravi's Heroism: An Important Disagreement among Earlier Critics

In comparing Pranav of Hamrā Lag Rahab? with Ravi of Navārambha, Sudhanshu Shekhar Chaudhary regards Ravi's character as more effective, because after the truth comes to light Ravi at least shows an inclination to prepare himself for struggle. The comparison matters because literary heroism is not equated with moral flawlessness. The critic detects a capacity for response and resistance amid the protagonist's failures.

Alongside this praise, however, he also objected that the final dramatic developments do not sufficiently substantiate Ravi's struggle and diminish the work's artistic effect. The objection must be taken seriously. If a character is suggested as an agent of historical transformation but his struggle gains no consequential narrative form, the claim to heroism remains hollow. The real critical question is not restricted to whether Ravi is or is not a hero; it concerns whether the narrative structure credibly realises the possibilities attributed to him.

20. Arun Kumar Jha's Sociological Interpretation: Contribution and Limitations

In Maithili Upanyāsak Samājśāstrīya Dṛṣṭi Adhyayan, Dr Arun Kumar Jha uses the novel's three parts to clarify the significance of feudal decline, a newly corrupt social culture, and the rising consciousness of the Dalit class. Attending to Shrikant Chaudhary, Ekwali Chaudhary, Harishchandra Mishra, Mahesh Master, and Ravi, he stresses class inequality and the limitations of reformism. The principal achievement of his study is its connection of the novel's sequence of events to a long process of social change.

His criticism uses severe moral epithets for Ravi. Such descriptions register strong disapproval of the character's failures, but moral condemnation alone is inadequate to literary evaluation. It is more fruitful to analyse separately the social causes shaping Ravi's violence, fear, flight, and reformist language. Condemnatory language may unintentionally narrow the psychological complexity of the figure. A just extension of social criticism therefore requires both clarity about responsibility and an understanding of causes.

21. Umesh Mandal's Reading of Sensibility

In his essay 'Maithili Upanyās Sāhityame Saṃvedanāk Svar' ('The Voice of Sensibility in Maithili Fiction'), Umesh Mandal connects the novel's three parts with processes of rise, decline, and renewal, particularly identifying the emergence of Dalit suffering and sensibility in the third. This assessment directs attention to the work's human centre. Historical transformation is not only an institutional event; it is also a process of changing the world of lived experience.

Nevertheless, the voice of sensibility must be read in connection with social agency. Recognising Dalit suffering is one stage; recognising Dalit rights and self-determination as the new historical centre of the work is another. Mandal's approach offers a useful point of entry into this second question.

22. Navārambha and Hamrā Lag Rahab?: The Grounds for Comparing Pranav and Ravi

The questions raised by the protagonists' ethical conduct in Prabhas's third and fourth novels provide a possible common thread. In Hamrā Lag Rahab?, Pranav witnesses exploitation but remains distant from decisive resistance. In Navārambha, Ravi himself commits violence as a bearer of feudal conditioning, then becomes caught in contradictions involving flight, return, and reformist aspirations. The two therefore cannot be placed in the same ethical position.

Pranav's chief weakness is his failure to respond adequately to injustice he sees; Ravi's predicament also includes responsibility for actively committing injustice. Erasing this distinction would destroy the value of the comparison. Sudhanshu Shekhar Chaudhary's emphasis on Ravi's readiness to struggle is helpful, but a critique of Ravi's crime remains independently necessary. A literary account of

social transformation can be credible in its treatment of heroism only if it recognises these unequal degrees of moral responsibility.

23. The Distance between a Character's Language and the Language of Ideas

A character's statements in a social novel cannot be treated as the author's final judgment. A defender of feudal tradition, a person congratulating himself on newly acquired status, and someone adopting the language of reform each claims a form of truth from a particular position. The novel's criticism develops through the conflicts among these claims.

The distance between Ravi's reformist vocabulary and his behaviour is especially important. If the novel makes that distance into irony, its realism becomes stronger. If, however, the story merely accepts the protagonist's speeches as authoritative, a formal weakness enters. The artistic success of dialogue lies not only in endorsing claims but also in exposing a character's self-deception.

24. Narrative Time and the Pace of Social Transition

The names of the three parts suggest different historical periods and social conditions. This temporal range allows the author to place one family, the relationships formed around it, and the changing consciousness of an excluded community in historical perspective. The narrative's extended duration also indicates that psychological change in individuals and structural change in society need not proceed at the same speed.

Ravi's departure and return offer a clear point of contact between these uneven processes. He encounters a changed village, yet the question remains whether he has fully escaped his inherited conditioning. A transformed map of social institutions is not sufficient evidence of the moral rebirth of consciousness. The formal use of time brings these two kinds of change before the reader.

25. The Achievement of Realism: Confronting Social Survivals

The importance of Navārambha's social realism lies in asking why new injustices proliferate after the older feudal system has ended. Collapse produces a vacuum, and new beneficiaries who inherit the habits of the old power come forward to fill it. In this transitional period women's bodies, Dalit labour, and rights over land can become objects of social competition.

The novel allows us to understand change not as a single moment of purification but as a prolonged struggle among unequal powers. Where conventional social history may name a class as heirs or administrative intermediaries, the novel encourages recognition of their unethical opportunism. Its literary force inheres in constructing that contradiction.

26. Artistic Limitations: Ravi's Psychological Coherence and the Dramatic Ending

The questions raised about Ravi constitute an important artistic criticism of the novel. How clearly is the psychological path shown by which a character implicated in feudal violence adopts the language of reform? What actions result from his sense of guilt? How persuasive is the narrative bridge between the declaration of struggle and actual struggle? The answers determine the structural success of the novel.

Sudhanshu Shekhar Chaudhary identifies a limitation in the drama of the ending. While recognising this criticism, one must remember that an imperfect protagonist is not automatically a formal defect. To depict the contradictions of reality, a novel may deliberately preserve a distance between intention and outcome. A problem emerges when the changing decisions of a character are not supported by sufficiently persuasive narrative motivation. Ravi's failure and the novelist's artistic failure should therefore not be treated as synonymous.

27. Limits of Emerging Dalit Consciousness: The Question of Representation

Critical recognition of the rise of Dalit consciousness in the third part underscores the novel's social importance. The question of literary representation of the exploited community does not end there, however. Who tells the story? Through whose perspective is Dalit experience shown? Who becomes the decision-maker in the transformed society? Such questions are standards by which to assess the novel's democratic possibilities.

If Dalit sensibility serves merely as a backdrop to a privileged hero's moral awakening, the history of the excluded is once again confined to an outsider's gaze. The third part has independent importance within the tripartite structure because it possesses the power to shift the narrative's centre. A social 'new beginning' must be defined by the Dalit community's own agency; otherwise the novel returns to another form of paternalistic reformism.

28. Contemporary Significance: New Rulers, Old Inequalities

Democratic institutions expanded after the decline of feudal authority, yet caste inequality, gender-based violence, and the culture of political patronage can survive in many forms. Navārambha has the capacity to give literary recognition to this continuity. New rhetoric, new titles, new schemes, and new political leaders do not by themselves demonstrate the ethical rebirth of a society.

A contemporary rereading is therefore important because Ravi's reformist claims can be measured against social justice. Women's consent, dignity across caste lines, and fair access to resources are tests of real change. Where a new order fails those tests, the word 'Navārambha' can also take on the questioning irony of the novel itself.

29. The Novel's Distinctiveness in Prabhas's Development

Abhiśapta addresses middle-class marriage and masculine pride; Yugpuruṣ satirises public greatness; and Hamrā Lag Rahab? offers varying foundations for literary concern in feudal influence, exploitation, and a protagonist's inaction. Navārambha brings these matters together on a larger historical canvas. Its structure moves from the rise and fall of one family to the emergence of new consciousness in the Dalit community, which gives the work its distinctive character.

Through this enlargement, the novel's vision advances from an individual-centred ethical crisis to the collective reconstruction of society. Yet Ravi is not left behind by this movement. His feudal habits complicate historical change. Here lies an important contradiction in Prabhas's social realism: even when older domination ends, the human bearers of its habits remain present in the making of a new society.

30. Conclusion: The Conditions of a Genuinely New Beginning

Navārambha is an ambitious novel that connects the memory of a feudal past, the irony of its decline, and the emergence of Dalit consciousness within a single imaginative history. The journey from Havelī Mohanpur through Laṅkā Mohanpur to Navārambha is fundamentally a journey through changing relationships between power and morality. Shrikant Chaudhary guards the older code of propriety; Ekwali Chaudhary, Harishchandra Mishra, and Mahesh Master represent an opportunistic new social sphere; Ravi, as a failed reformist hero, exposes the persistence of feudal conditioning; and Kavita becomes living ethical testimony to the consequences of violence.

The novel's achievement is to make the emergence of a new society intelligible not as a predestined victory but as a process of confronting an immoral inheritance. Ravi's crime against Kavita, his flight, return, and relationship overshadowed by remorse show that the language of personal reform is no substitute for nonviolent, egalitarian conduct. The new Dalit consciousness reaches beyond that limitation by opening the possibility of collective agency.

Yet questions of craft remain: the psychological foundations of Ravi's moral transformation, the space granted to the independent voice of the woman subjected to violence, and the social credibility of the final dramatic developments. Notwithstanding these limitations, the novel's distinctive literary importance remains intact. Navārambha teaches readers that a new age is not made meaningful by the fall of an old haveli but by establishing in practice the dignity of the disadvantaged, women's autonomy, and social justice.

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SECTION ONE · NOVELS / REVIEW 5

5. Rājā Pokharime Katek Machharī? ('How Many Fish Are There in the King's Pond?'): Folkloric Resistance, Bhaskar's Cultural Tragedy, and the Moral Disintegration of Feudal Society

An Extended Literary Review of the Novel by Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary

Abstract

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary's Rājā Pokharime Katek Machharī? exemplifies a thought-provoking tendency in the modern Maithili novel: the possibility of resisting social injustice and the defeat of the person who resists are presented within a single narrative world. In the available opening episode, Bhaskar hears from his grandmother the folk tale of Kathari Babaji. Despite repeated beatings, Babaji persistently questions the thieves whose path he obstructs; his unwavering insistence establishes in the young Bhaskar the foundations of a sense of justice, the search for truth, and moral courage. The subsequent genealogy of a feudal family—its wealth, its violent customs of exercising authority over women, and its domestic partitions—exposes the unequal structure of social life. During Bhaskar's short life, encounters with immorality in universities and public institutions subject this early ethical instruction to a demanding historical test. Published criticism associates figures such as Jumman, Brahm, and Mahendra with differing forms of social oppression and responsibility. The king, pond, and fish in the title may be read as images of power, a circumscribed space of life, and subjects who can be counted, although this is an interpretative possibility rather than an explicit description supplied by the narrative. This essay analyses the embedding of folklore, childhood curiosity, feudal genealogy, exploitation, resistance, institutional crisis, characterisation, tragedy, and dialogue with earlier critics. The work's principal achievement is to make the difficulty of preserving moral steadfastness in the face of injustice deeply affecting; its critical challenge is to determine how responsibility for Bhaskar's loss is to be assigned not merely to individual wickedness but to society's pervasive silence and structures of power.

Keywords: Rājā Pokharime Katek Machharī?; Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary; Bhaskar; Kathari Babaji; Jumman; Brahm; Mahendra; folklore; feudalism; social resistance; cultural tragedy.

1. Introduction: The Interrogative Title and the Language of Power

The title Rājā Pokharime Katek Machharī? immediately presents a curious contradiction. A pond is a living domain of water, yet the pond in the title is identified with a 'king'. Who counts the fish within this body of water? Why is someone interested in knowing their number? Under whose authority are the

lives of the fish understood to fall? These questions take the title beyond a simple expression of rural curiosity towards a wider social resonance.

One can recognise an inequality between the king as a sign of power and fish as relatively vulnerable living creatures. One possible critical reading is that a powerful person treats the people not as human beings with independent lives but as objects that can be counted. Yet this interpretation must not be presented as a direct statement made by the novel; it is more accurate to treat it as one possible meaning of the title. The struggle between power and insecurity in the demonstrable narrative world provides an intellectual basis for this reading.

2. Folklore at the Beginning: A Separate Tale, a Shared Moral World

A striking feature of the novel's available opening is the story of Kathari Babaji told by Bhaskar's grandmother. Babaji asks questions of thieves who have set out to steal on a dark night. His questioning interferes with their criminal enterprise, and the thieves respond violently. Yet even after suffering blows, he refuses to stop questioning them. This brief folk narrative develops an extraordinary form of resistance: not the use of physical strength or weapons, but the fearless insistence that wrongdoing be publicly identified for what it is.

The folk tale is not decorative. It becomes the first principle of Bhaskar's childhood moral world. Before the main narrative begins, a question is established: if a person speaking the truth is beaten, will that person abandon the question? The recurrence of this question can be read as an anticipation of Bhaskar's subsequent social conflicts.

3. Kathari Babaji: The Persistence of Questioning Amid Violence

What is most astonishing about Kathari Babaji is not simply that he is beaten, but that his question remains alive after the beating. The thieves attempt in various ways to frighten him, take him along with them, and silence him. But Babaji will not relinquish his ordinary inquiry. The repeated appearance of the question in the path of wrongdoing eventually undermines the criminals' confidence.

Kathari Babaji may be seen as embodying an extreme form of nonviolent resistance. He refuses to enter the cycle of revenge; the public consequences of his question fall upon the wrongdoers themselves. The tale reveals an astonishing moral capacity in a person whose body can be beaten but who cannot be compelled to accept immorality. Babaji's being 'kathari' need not imply that his body is literally inanimate; it can be understood as a folkloric conception of spiritual steadfastness in the face of violence.

4. The Thieves' 'Omen': Crime and Its Own Moral Grammar

A subtle social irony operates in the thieves' behaviour. They associate their journey to commit theft with the language of an auspicious omen, or śagun. The

crime itself is not considered inauspicious; what is regarded as a bad omen is being questioned on the way to commit it. This inversion reveals the human ability to manufacture self-justification. The perpetrator of an act regarded as wrong by society devises a separate ritual, rationale, and system of auspicious and inauspicious signs for the conduct in question.

For precisely this reason, the folk tale connects with the novel's larger social world. Feudal domination, institutional favouritism, and unethical privilege may similarly describe their own practices as honour, tradition, or the defence of order. Kathari Babaji's question stands in direct opposition to these self-made justifications. He does not expound an elaborate theory; his question exposes the concealed name of an immoral action.

5. Grandmother and Bhaskar: Moral Education Through Oral Tradition

The grandmother tells Kathari Babaji's story, and Bhaskar seeks to understand it. The arrangement brings folk memory and childhood curiosity into living contact. The grandmother passes a tale received through tradition to the next generation; Bhaskar does not accept it with passive reverence. If Babaji was made of wood, the child asks, why did blood flow from his body and why did the blows hurt him? The question brings the supernatural language of folklore into conflict with the child's reasoning grounded in experience.

The grandmother's answer is decisive. She does not simply laugh away the child's question but distinguishes bodily vulnerability from spiritual invincibility. The story thus ceases to be merely an object of conventional devotion and becomes a difficult lesson in justice, courage, and truth-telling. In Bhaskar's childhood, reason and compassion are not separate; each supports the other.

6. The Child's Question: Reinterpreting Faith

Bhaskar has the courage to ask questions. After hearing the grandmother's tale, his curiosity concerns the physical reality of Kathari Babaji's suffering. His inquiry opens a dialogue between two modes of knowledge: the ethical meaning expressed in folklore and the factual possibility raised by the child. Bhaskar seeks to bring the two into accord.

From this standpoint, the novel's opening is not a celebration of blind faith. The grandmother's dialogue with Bhaskar develops the possibility that morality need not stand opposed to reason. His later conflicts with the immorality of institutions may be understood as an extension of this early curiosity. The novel acquires its larger shape when the child's question becomes a question addressed to society.

7. Grandmother's Night-Time Setting: Home, Memory, and the Warmth of Story

The setting of storytelling joins a winter night, the grandmother's affection, and the fire of the household. Here a tale of violence and resistance is heard within the security of loving intimacy. This contrast matters: in the safety of bodily closeness, a child first acquires a moral understanding of a world marked by injustice. The story builds a bridge between the household and the outside world.

Because of the grandmother's relationship with Bhaskar, his questions are not forbidden; they are allowed to develop. The significance of this affectionate setting deepens when contrasted with the harshness of his later social life. For someone whose earliest lesson has been to question injustice, compromise with immoral institutions will understandably remain difficult.

8. The Feudal Family House: The Social Meaning of Architecture

The available narrative passages describe Bhaskar's family home in detail. Rooms on four sides of a courtyard, division of property among brothers, separate storerooms and kitchens, and the construction of a dalan or reception hall are not merely architectural details. They preserve the distribution of authority and the memory of the family. The rooms become material signs of changing relationships within the lineage.

In a village feudal family, a home is not just a dwelling: it is an institution of property, prestige, and public contact. After partition, rooms take on new uses, but the memory of the old social order persists. As a place of public gathering, the dalan lends a further form to the family's public ascendancy. Reading the domestic geography therefore reveals part of the history of power relations.

9. Maharudra Chaudhary's Splendour: Prestige and Fear Together

In the available opening, Maharudra Chaudhary appears as an emblem of feudal prestige and a life of cultivated pleasure. Public performances of dance and song, wealth, and social influence are portrayed together. Yet fear and a violent inclination to exercise authority over women accompany this outward cultural splendour. Within the world presented by the author, 'refinement' or the enjoyment of the arts cannot therefore be treated as automatic proof of civilisation or ethical generosity.

A distinctive feature of feudal ascendancy is that violence and prestige become two sides of the same social persona. A society that celebrates the 'greatness' of the powerful may push their atrocities to the margins of memory. The old world embodied by Maharudra Chaudhary provides an occasion to challenge this selective remembrance.

10. High Lineage, Marriage, and the Politics of Descent

In the account of the family line, the social significance of marriage alliances is especially important. A desire to establish ties with an eminent Brahmin family appears connected with the feudal household's rank and social acceptance. Marriage here is not simply an occasion for family happiness; it may become an institutional instrument for acquiring prestige. Claims of high birth and economic power combine in an attempt to legitimate unequal relationships.

The details of several marriages within the household, the giving away of daughters, property division, and arrangements for residence show how deeply personal lives were subject to communal classifications. The extent to which women could exercise independent choice in marriage is a necessary question for social criticism of this world. When the history of a lineage is understood solely as the succession of men's property, women's histories of experience become obscured.

11. The Separate Kitchen for Widows: Body, Purity, and Control

The household's arrangement of a separate kitchen for widows is an important cultural sign. A spatial separation based on the preparation of food, notions of ritual purity, and marital status may be understood as a form of traditional control over women's bodies and everyday lives. Social hierarchy is present here not only in the external organisation of the village but even in the intimate practices of cooking and eating.

The separation of kitchens may be remembered socially as 'custom', but a critical reading must ask by what authority different rules are imposed upon women living within the same family. Even such necessities of life as food, fire, and the home are not free from social power. The author's detailed domestic descriptions become a source for recognising this subtle hierarchy.

12. Bhaskar: Childhood Formation Against Injustice and the Adult World

Published sociological criticism identifies Bhaskar as the novel's protagonist. His life is described as brief but as coming into contact with several social spheres. Read beside the childhood episodes, this assessment discloses a fundamental conflict in his character: the boy influenced by Kathari Babaji's moral curiosity grows into a young man who encounters unethical practices in public institutions.

To elevate Bhaskar into an idealised great hero would diminish the complexity of his tragedy. How much support does his commitment to truth receive within social relationships? What choices does he make when confronted with injustice? Where are the limits of social isolation and moral resistance? Considering these questions illuminates the novel's possible central structure.

13. Bhaskar's Death: The End of a Person or the Loss of an Idea?

Published criticism describes Bhaskar's life as a narrative of premature destruction. The loss is not merely the removal of one character's personal future; it is also the destruction of a possibility for healthy and just social life. In this sense Bhaskar's fate carries a note of cultural mourning alongside personal grief.

Yet merely expressing sorrow over Bhaskar's loss leaves the question of social responsibility unanswered. If unethical pressure from institutions and relationships breaks his life, the crisis cannot be reduced to 'fate'. It results from circumstances in which a person of moral conviction becomes vulnerable precisely because of that conviction. The novel quietly asks its reader not merely which individual should be punished for Bhaskar's destruction, but which changeable social arrangements are responsible.

14. The University World: Modern Education's Ethical Examination

Published discussions of Bhaskar's life refer to injustice and immorality in the university environment. This is particularly meaningful because a university is generally understood as an institution of knowledge, inquiry, reasoning, and independent thought. The young Bhaskar of the opening is himself a questioning child; if this questioning person encounters injustice in an institution of learning, a profound distance opens between modern education's declared ideals and actual practice.

It would be improper to turn this institutional criticism into the sweeping conclusion that 'all universities are corrupt'. The novel asks what place remains for a truthful person when power dominates knowledge. Inequity may enter the distribution of opportunity, prestige, discipline, and institutional protection on a university campus; this general social concern is consistent with Bhaskar's story.

15. State Power and the Paradox of the Modern Republic

Sociological criticism refers to the unethical world of modern republican government and educational institutions encountered by Bhaskar. After the account of the feudal household, the appearance of modern institutions deepens the narrative's political meaning. Even if the old emblems of kingship disappear, the dignity of the people is not automatically secured when oppression continues under the names of new forms of legitimacy.

From this perspective, the history of a feudal lineage and the story of modern institutions are not unrelated. Both raise questions about arbitrary authority and the absence of accountability. The work's historical importance lies in this possible continuity: the name of the state and its rules may change while those who benefit from injustice retain their influence. Bhaskar's resistance acquires meaning as opposition to that continuity.

16. Kathari Babaji and Bhaskar: Similarities and Differences in the Moral Principle

A strong symbolic connection may be established between Kathari Babaji and Bhaskar. Babaji continues to question the thieves who cross his path; Bhaskar reaches a point at which he cannot accept unethical conduct across different domains of society. Both must endure pressure. Yet Babaji in the folk tale becomes an extreme emblem of indestructible patience, whereas Bhaskar is portrayed as a human being who can be overcome by historical and social circumstances.

This distinction matters to the novel's tragic structure. In folklore, steadfast questioning exhausts the criminals; in social reality, the questioner may have to pay with his life. Thus the folk tale establishes an ethical ideal, while Bhaskar's experience brings the real-world limits of that ideal into view. The novelist's narrative skill may be located in the construction of this contradiction.

17. Jumman: An Exceptional Possibility for Humanity

Published criticism connects Jumman's character with human generosity and the desire to safeguard the lives of others. One critical observation remembers him as a man who, even after suffering the loss of his own son, wishes to protect another person's son. The moral significance is profound: Jumman's compassion crosses the biological limits of family and recognises equal worth in another person's life.

From this standpoint, Jumman is more than a supporting character. He moves beyond the negative form of resistance—refusing injustice—to make possible a positive form of humanity: wanting to protect strangers or others who suffer. His role suggests a common foundation for truth, compassion, and social fellowship. Nevertheless, this should be understood as an examination of the principal ethical dimension identified in available criticism, not a complete judgement of his character.

18. Brahm: An Emblem of Collective Frustration

Arun Kumar Jha's study reads Brahm as a symbol of frustrated social power. The significance of this approach is that an opposing figure is not confined to personal hatred or petty self-interest. Suppressed fear, humiliation, violence, and opportunism within society may combine to exert destructive pressure upon an individual's life.

Care is needed in defining the critical sense of 'frustrated power'. This is an interpretation of literary symbolism, not a detailed retelling of every episode involving Brahm. Even so, it allows Bhaskar's crisis to be connected with an ideological sickness within society. Injustice ceases to be merely an incident attributable to one person and becomes part of a collective disposition.

19. Mahendra: The Personification of Responsible Power

Sociological criticism identifies Mahendra as a personification of the power responsible for Bhaskar's crisis. This reading reveals an important structural role: in the narrative, social oppression does not remain an abstract explanation but becomes visible through individual behaviour and decisions.

Here Mahendra must not be identified with Bhaskar's father, Mahendranath Chaudhary, without explicit evidence from the original text. Similarity of names cannot establish the entire identity of two characters, and doing so could distort the criticism. Mahendranath's place in the genealogy of Bhaskar's childhood and Mahendra's symbolic role in political and social commentary rest upon different textual grounds; they therefore require separate treatment.

20. Bhaskar's Father Mahendranath and the Generational Genealogy

In the available opening, Mahendranath Chaudhary appears as Bhaskar's father. The traditions of Maharudra Chaudhary's family, the partition of its house, and the account of social prestige are associated with this lineage. Its history establishes the social foundations of Bhaskar's personality. He is not a moral miracle born in a vacuum, but a child who develops curiosity within inherited feudal conventions.

The possibility of Bhaskar's resistance becomes more meaningful in this setting. Privilege received from tradition and morality acquired through reflection do not always coincide. A child raised in a household connected with a system can create a critical distance from that very system. The family narrative establishes the basis for developing this inner conflict.

21. Folk Memory and History: From the Glory of Lineage to the Record of Violence

The grandmother's tale and the feudal genealogy are both representations of the past, but their ethical orientations differ. Folklore preserves the memory of a holy man who questions injustice; the family history recounts wealth, authority, marriages, domestic partition, and prestige. The reader can thus perceive that traditions of resistance and traditions of domination coexist in the memory of the same society.

Literature matters because it can make this coexistence visible. Whose story does history preserve—the ruler's or the resister's? The grandmother's folk tale is an ethical memory outside conventional archives, while the genealogy of the household records the accumulation of institutional power. Bhaskar's life may be read as an outcome of the collision between these histories.

22. The Pond in the Title: A Metaphor for a Confined Sphere of Life

In rural Mithila, a pond brings together water, fish, labour, its banks, and communal memory. A pond identified by a king in the title may raise the question of private entitlement. Asking how many fish inhabit it directs attention towards their countable presence rather than their autonomy as living creatures. On this basis, the pond can be interpreted critically as a metaphor for a society circumscribed by feudal or institutional power.

Yet the title alone cannot substantiate a claim that the entire novel concerns ecology or the fishing livelihood. The available narrative focuses on Bhaskar's social life and resistance to injustice. The image of the pond should therefore remain within the limits of symbolic interpretation. Such restraint preserves the title's aesthetic openness.

23. Counting and Dignity: The Political Meaning of the Question About Fish

The language of numbers may serve administrative convenience or the accumulation of power. The concern with quantity implicit in 'how many fish' seems distinct from the question of human dignity. Bhaskar's tragedy creates an opportunity to challenge that division. If society finds it more convenient to remove a person than to value that person's living ethical commitments, the human being is reduced to a number or an obstacle.

This reading of the title is a critical proposal, not an assertion that can be attributed to an original character. It is, however, consistent with the novel's known preoccupation with exploitation and resistance. Unlike a count, dignity is an immeasurable human value. Bhaskar's loss forces the reader to confront this conflict of values.

24. The Craft of Dialogue: Repeated Questions and Moral Pressure

In the Kathari Babaji episode, the repeated asking of the same ordinary question creates a narrative rhythm. Each time the question returns, the violence proves again its inability to justify itself. Repetition increases the story's humour, tension, and ethical pressure together. This is an important narrative resource of folk style.

The dialogue between Bhaskar and his grandmother takes a different rhythm. There the question is not intended to stop a thief but to understand an inconsistency within the story. The author consequently uses 'questioning' at two levels: public resistance to wrongdoing and the private pursuit of knowledge. This formal parallel creates unity between the folk tale and the earliest moral sensibility of the main narrative.

25. The Plot's Moral Movement: From Reassurance to Tragedy

The protection of Bhaskar's grandmother in childhood and the courage expressed in the folk tale create a bright possibility for his future. Subsequent criticism records the premature loss of his life. Between these two poles the narrative develops an ethical movement: why does the society that inspires someone to pursue justice fail to protect that same just person in actual life?

The tragic effect arises not merely because fate brings a sorrowful ending, but from the distance between the promise of the beginning and the failure at the end. In the Kathari Babaji tale, the criminals eventually give way; in Bhaskar's social world, commitment to justice provides no sufficient guarantee of survival. This difference transforms the novel's pathos into intellectual unease.

26. The Strengths and Limits of Social Realism

To call a novel realist is meaningful when its characters appear subject to concrete pressures exerted by social relationships. The detailed account of feudal genealogy, arbitrary authority over women, internal divisions of the household, and critical information concerning injustice in modern institutions grounds this social perspective. The individual struggles not in an abstract laboratory of morality but within a historically constituted society.

Yet describing the work as realist cannot automatically establish the credibility of every event. In an earlier assessment, Dr Bhimnath Jha praises Prabhas's engaging, unforced narrative flow while questioning occasional sudden turns towards melodrama. This objection is important from a literary standpoint. Even when a novel succeeds in its broad social purpose, the causal relations between events must remain convincing.

27. Bhimnath Jha's Criticism: Precision of Setting and the Problem of Melodrama

According to Bhimnath Jha's opinion quoted in a published sociological study, Prabhas's strength lies in presenting, with narrative appeal, the familiar world of Mithila's rural environment, disintegrating feudal households, and changing economic and social relationships. His ability to give new meanings to popular expressions and traditions in altered contexts is counted among his literary gifts. This judgement accords with the folkloric design at the opening of Rājā Pokharime Katek Machharī?.

At the same time, Bhimnath Jha notes inconsistencies that sometimes arise when an abrupt dramatic turn interrupts the natural flow of the story. The force of his position is that literary compassion and social commitment cannot replace discipline in plotting. The tragedy of Bhaskar's loss can leave an enduring impression on the reader only if its sequence of causes is sufficiently credible.

28. Umesh Mandal's Perspective: Resistance Alongside Exploitation

In 'Maithili Upanyās Sāhityame Saṃvedanāk Svar' ('The Voice of Sensibility in Maithili Fiction'), Umesh Mandal considers the novel a poignant, sensitive, and natural narrative of exploitation and resistance. This brief evaluation grasps the work's fundamental conflict. Depicting oppression does not by itself produce a literature committed to justice; the response of the oppressed, the will to question, and the possibility of resistance sharpen a work's social meaning.

The Kathari Babaji episode gives this resistance its ethical language, while Bhaskar's social life tests its historical value. Resistance is therefore not simply an event of confrontation in the novel; it is the capacity for refusal that develops within a person. Extending Mandal's reading centred on sensibility, we may understand the novel's compassion and resistance as mutually dependent.

29. Arun Kumar Jha's Sociological Interpretation

Dr Arun Kumar Jha's Maithili Upanyāsak Samājśāstrīya Dṛṣṭi Adhyayan ('A Sociological Study of the Maithili Novel') offers an important discussion of Kathari Babaji, Bhaskar's life, immorality in modern social institutions, and the roles of Jumman, Brahm, and Mahendra. Jha connects Bhaskar's premature loss with cultural loss and moves beyond the reader's sympathy to ask who actually bears responsibility for the death and social failure.

The particular value of this approach is that compassion is not allowed to become a place of self-satisfaction. Readers may grieve for Bhaskar, but they must then examine the practices that protect injustice and the part played by social silence. Jha's analysis opens a useful path towards this question, even as an independent examination of the complete character system of the original novel remains a separate critical necessity.

30. Social Responsibility: Not Only the Criminals but Also the Onlookers

In the Kathari Babaji folk tale, the thieves are the criminals, but at times those who have not properly understood the situation also join in beating Babaji. The implication is profound: immorality may be sustained not only by deliberate offenders but also by social confusion and unthinking collective reactions.

The sociological questions raised by Bhaskar's tragedy point in the same direction. It is necessary to ask who directly caused a person's death or loss. Yet a wider question concerns all those who helped create and perpetuate an environment in which a person devoted to justice remained continually vulnerable. The novel thus becomes a narrative of social self-examination rather than a story of private grief alone.

31. The Distinctiveness of the Last Novel in the Context of All Five

Prabhas's Abhiśapta reveals the self-contradictions of educated middle-class marriage; Yugpuruṣ raises questions about public glorification and class-based paradoxes; Hamrā Lag Rahab? examines the moral inactivity of Pranav, a witness to exploitation; and Navārambha centres upon feudal decline and emergent Dalit consciousness. In this sequence, Rājā Pokharime Katek Machharī? stands apart for its moving portrayal of the solitary resistance of a person conscious of injustice and of that person's historical vulnerability.

This comparison should not be mistaken for an inevitable judgement about chronology of publication or the author's 'progress'. Each novel has its own structure and social centre. Yet reading the five together reveals a shared concern: how can the violence, self-interest, and moral confusion surviving within respectable society be recognised? The final novel places this question in the contrast between a child's innocent curiosity and the merciless experiences of adult society.

32. Artistic Achievements and the Limits of This Examination

The available passages reveal three substantial achievements. First, the folk tale becomes a living moral inquiry through a child's questions. Second, a historically specific form of power acquires concrete location through realistic descriptions of the feudal household's material world. Third, the tragic confrontation between childhood moral formation and social failure becomes a moving imaginative possibility.

Nevertheless, a fully confident judgement of the entire work's technique, each character's development, and the final sequence of events would require a close reading of the complete original. An examination founded on the accessible opening of a published Hindi translation and plot details preserved in Maithili criticism is best regarded as a broad critical proposal. Concealing the limits of one's knowledge by adding fabricated incidents or pretending to quote directly would destroy the reliability of literary study. This essay therefore maintains a distinction between documented episodes and interpretative possibilities.

33. Conclusion: The Invincibility of the Question and the Defeat of Society

The most compelling meaning of Rājā Pokharime Katek Machharī? emerges in its defence of the right to question. Kathari Babaji's folk tale teaches that questioning injustice is itself an act of courage. The grandmother's conversation gives that courage a rational and emotional foundation in young Bhaskar. The history of the feudal household demonstrates that a long tradition of violence may be concealed beneath the glitter of prestige. Bhaskar's confrontation with immorality in modern institutions extends this problem into the social present.

Jumman's compassion, Brahm's emblematic repression, and the critical account of the power embodied in Mahendra suggest that the story concerns a whole society rather than merely one individual. Bhaskar's premature loss awakens grief in the reader, yet the novel's lasting value lies in transforming that grief into an uncomfortable question: who is responsible when a person who asks disinterested questions is left unsafe?

In this sense, the king and the fish in the pond cease to be simply a rural scene and become a possible metaphor for social inequality. The novel's underlying ethical demand is that the value of life be determined not by figures or prestige assigned by the powerful but by human dignity, the courage to speak truth, and the ability to stand against injustice. Prabhas's novel brings its readers into painful and penetrating contact with that demand.

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SECTION TWO · SHORT-STORY COLLECTIONS / REVIEW 6

6. Narrative Landscapes of Hunger, Memory, Power, and Resistance

A Comprehensive Literary Review of Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary's Didval: Modern Maithili Short Fiction · Close Reading · Narratological Analysis

Abstract

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary's Didval is a Maithili short-story collection in which several levels of experience converge: rural life in the middle of the twentieth century, the urban solitude of later decades, institutional callousness, the contradictions of popular movements, and fractures in domestic relationships. The collection's twenty stories do not belong to a uniform historical moment, but recurring voices of hunger, displacement, waiting, humiliation, ethical choice, social inequality, and an indomitable human sense of being create a profound inner unity. 'Dharatī Kuhari Uṭhal' questions the social purpose of writing fiction; 'Grām Sudhār Samiti' and 'Viśeṣādhikār' expose institutional pretence; 'Mandākinī' gives emotional complexity to memory and the disintegration of the home; 'Didval' develops the tension between fear and self-examination within modern routine; 'Pativratā' confronts class, gender inequality, and the politics of the body; and 'Aṣṭāvakrak Śeṣ Kathā' explores religious ritual, group mentality, and contradictions inherent in social hierarchy. This review considers both the collection's achievements and its limitations, not merely through an account of subject matter but by close reading of viewpoint, dialogue, internal conflict, satire, temporal structure, and linguistic register.

Keywords

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary; Didval; modern Maithili short fiction; social realism; rural power; women's experiences; narrative craft; satire; memory; resistance.

1. Introduction: Fiction, Society, and the Pressure of Time

In assigning Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary his place in the tradition of modern Maithili short fiction, it would be inadequate to describe him simply as a social realist. His characters are enmeshed in webs of social relationships, but their crises often appear less through external events than through self-respect, incapacity, guilt, or uncertainty in making decisions. Sometimes the storyteller reveals an entire structure of power in an unremarkable office conversation; elsewhere a village home, illness, river, field, or journey on foot exposes the meaning of wider social disparities. Fiction here becomes not merely an account of 'events' but an examination of pressures exerted upon human beings.

Didval was published after the author's death. The coexistence of early and later writings brings readers into contact with the author's sensibility across an extended period. The early stories foreground the difference between the public language of social reform and actual life; in many later stories, the complexities of the city, livelihood, institutional systems, memory, and intimate relationships seem to increase. It would be mistaken, however, to impose a rigid dividing line, for introspection is alive in the earlier works and social resistance in the later ones. The collection matters because of the changes taking place within this continuity.

The wider context of Prabhas's literary contribution deserves notice. Following the publication of Kathā-Prabhās: Tīn Daśakak Pratinidhi Maithili Kathā, he received the Sahitya Akademi Award for Prabhāsak Kathā. His involvement in story editing and literary gatherings is also an important aspect of the public culture of Maithili fiction. Yet prizes and reputation cannot substitute for an evaluation of the works themselves. The decisive evidence in studying Didval remains the artistic organisation and possibilities of meaning within its stories.

2. The Collection's Design: Twenty Stories Across Different Times

The collection includes, in sequence, 'Dharatī Kuhari Uṭhal', 'Pratīkṣā', 'Grām Sudhār Samiti', 'Abhiśāp', 'Yātrā: Herāyal Bāṭpar', 'Saṃbhāvanā', 'Samīkaraṇ', 'Punarāvṛtti', 'Sīmābaddha', 'Guṇḍapanī', 'Bīti Jaybāk Khuśī', 'Viśeṣādhikār', 'Bāp-Kaṭhbāp', 'Kakaro Āṛme', 'Mandākinī', 'Ijotme Herāyal Loksabh', 'Didval', 'Khūnī', 'Pativratā', and 'Aṣṭāvakrak Śeṣ Kathā'. Read thematically, these works bring into conversation short and long stories, social satire and tales of psychological states, the voices of rural groups and the solitary mind.

A number of stories indicate a date of composition at their conclusion. Such chronological markers can help us read transformations in narrative language, but they should not be converted into conclusive proof of a straightforward progression in the author's ideas. Stories written for different journals, delays between composition and publication, and experiments with subject matter may all have affected the sequence. It is more useful to compare the linguistic emphasis, forms of satire, and kinds of freedom afforded to characters within the particular situations of each story.

Two prefatory statements, 'Ī Saṅgrah' ('This Collection') and 'Pāpā' ('Papa'), clarify the volume's memorial circumstances. On one side stands confidence in the social effect of Prabhas's fiction; on the other is an intimate remembrance by a family member. Each offers the reader a perspective of reception. Critically, the latter should be recognised as affectionate testimony, not an incontestable literary verdict. Independent criticism begins by asking whether the stories substantiate or complicate the values advanced in the preliminaries.

3. 'Dharatī Kuhari Uṭhal': The Ethics of Writing and the Neglected Human Being

In the opening story 'Dharatī Kuhari Uṭhal' ('The Earth Groaned'), the occasion of a school competition in stories and poems causes a writer-character to look towards society, transforming an ordinary question about literary inspiration into an ethical problem. Seeking themes of happiness, beauty, or entertainment is no longer straightforward, for settlements, deprivation, and the ugly realities of life surround the observing gaze. The story's distinctive feature is that it first acquaints the reader with the question 'Why write a story?'; only then does social inequality become its subject. In this sense it functions like an authorial manifesto without becoming a theoretical manifesto.

The work does not stop at compiling a catalogue of suffering. Inner discomfort, an inability to transform observed reality into language, and hesitation before beautiful description all reveal the storyteller's self-critical stance. The story's power resides in the unease of a speaker who cannot find a trustworthy agreement between inherited aesthetic sensibility and immediate experience. To call it merely 'a story about poverty' would diminish its central formal experiment.

4. 'Pratīkṣā', 'Grām Sudhār Samiti', and 'Abhiśāp': Time, Institutions, and Helplessness

In 'Pratīkṣā' ('Waiting'), waiting is not a passive stretch of time but a psychological structure of relationships and hope. Something that ought to arrive is continually deferred; this condition becomes the story's rhythm. The question is not merely whether the wait ends, but how far a person waiting can preserve agency over his or her own life. The story leads the reader into an ethical region of incompletion, where hope itself may also become a cause of suffering.

The title 'Grām Sudhār Samiti' ('Village Improvement Committee') contains two reassuring terms, institution and reform. Within the story, conflicts between rural authority, public speeches, organisation, and vested interests expose the hollowness of those promises. Forming a committee, passing resolutions, or proclaiming the public good is insufficient until local power equations and personal interests are identified. Prabhas creates a comic contradiction between the slogans of public welfare and actual social conduct; satire does not oppose compassion here but sharpens it.

'Abhiśāp' ('Curse') brings into focus the constraints of private life, insecurity, and the uncertainty of the future. The story does not appear intended to conceal the characters' difficulties beneath religious fatalism; questions about family expectations and unequal distribution of opportunity become apparent behind those difficulties. Its value lies in depicting adverse circumstances not as an exceptional accident but as a component of ordinary social life. In some passages,

however, the author's ethical insistence reduces the characters' freedom to remain ambiguous. If not a defect, this is certainly a limitation open to criticism.

5. 'Yātrā: Herāyal Bāṭpar' and 'Saṃbhāvanā': Stasis Within Movement

The opening journey in 'Yātrā: Herāyal Bāṭpar' ('Journey: On a Lost Road')—roads, river, ferry landing, village, and the difficulty of travel—gives the fictional world geographical solidity. Travelling alters the scenery but does not automatically simplify a character's life. The story generates meaning through the connection between changes of external place and inner disorientation. The local organisation of the village is joined to its transport arrangements, revealing that a road is not equally open to everyone. Bodily labour, the duration of waiting, and unequal opportunities make travel a social event.

The title 'Saṃbhāvanā' ('Possibility') offers a future-oriented promise, but in Prabhas's creative world a possibility is not something easily obtained. Characters think, test, resolve, or postpone decisions; circumstances continually pull them in different directions. The story makes productive use of this interval. Its effect derives less from sensational twists than from the tension preceding choice. Readers may also recognise different kinds of relationship with this narrative structure in 'Punarāvṛtti' and 'Sīmābaddha'.

6. 'Samīkaraṇ' and 'Punarāvṛtti': The Arithmetic of Domestic Life

In 'Samīkaraṇ' ('Equation'), the dominant atmosphere of fear emerges from the night, the enclosed room of the house, insecurity, and interactions among family members. The prospect of theft and the distrust spreading inside the home do more than create suspense; they become a commentary on the economy of family relationships. The term 'equation' suggests mathematical neutrality, yet the calculation of status, respect, property, and trust within a home is never impartial. The story gives social significance to this uncertain arithmetic of addition and subtraction.

The opening image of a closed room and long solitude in 'Punarāvṛtti' ('Repetition') conveys the experience of everyday activities becoming a cycle. A desire to connect with the world outside and fear of the possible consequences of that connection are present together. The story depends more upon the repetition of a mental condition than on the linear advancement of events. Repetition is not only of action but of thought: the mind returns again and again to a question for which it cannot find a solution.

Comparing these two works reveals a particular ability of the author. He does not take the family for granted as a permanent sanctuary. The house's door, closed room, courtyard, kitchen, and brief exchanges among relatives may offer reassurance or become instruments of oppression. The criticism of social reality is present not outside institutional structures alone but within private relationships.

7. 'Sīmābaddha', 'Guṇḍapanī', and 'Bīti Jaybāk Khuśī': Paradoxes of Modern Life

In 'Sīmābaddha' ('Bounded'), important elements include the meeting of acquaintances after a long interval, the crowd of the city, social distance, and the awkwardness of conversation. The contrast between fashionable intellectual subjects in the modern educated world and real human loneliness becomes clear. It is easy to discuss rights or social systems in public; understanding the unfamiliar suffering of the person standing before us is difficult. The title gestures towards invisible boundaries constraining human relationships. Here the author employs a technique of self-division rather than merely bitter satire.

In 'Guṇḍapanī' ('Hooliganism'), coercion and bullying infiltrate ordinary community life. The exercise of force is not confined to physical assault; an atmosphere of fear, the commands of influential people, and the narrowing of possibilities for dissent are also part of it. The story insists upon the distinction between power and legitimacy. Its narrative world suggests that many practices regarded as 'normal' in local society are in fact habitual exercises of inequality.

'Bīti Jaybāk Khuśī' ('The Happiness of Its Passing') is noteworthy for the reversal of expectations in its meaning. There is 'happiness' in the title, but it does not express full satisfaction. Even the passage of time may feel like liberation because the present has become unbearable. With such a paradoxical title, Prabhas unsettles the reader's initial assumptions. The story particularly rewards attention to brevity and suggestion: it does not bring the question posed by the title to an end with one unequivocal answer.

8. 'Viśeṣādhikār', 'Bāp-Kaṭhbāp', and 'Kakaro Āṛme': Rights and Their Reversed Meanings

'Viśeṣādhikār' ('Special Privilege') is an extremely brief satirical story. The leave application of an ill employee, an officer's response, and workplace behaviour reveal the distance between the language of rights and basic human needs. A feverish body confronts the formalities of paper. The criticism falls upon how easily an institutional right may be transformed into a performance of favour. In few words, the story skilfully articulates a relationship of power.

In 'Bāp-Kaṭhbāp' ('Father and Hard-Hearted Father'), affection and severity coexist within a familial form of address. The intimacy of 'father' and the distance conveyed by 'kaṭhbāp' constitute the story's tension. The image of the family patriarch, needed support in times of illness or helplessness, and the experience of authority within the household are placed in an uncomfortable relationship. The title holds contradictory feelings together in a single breath. The reader cannot easily conclude that the author wishes to make one character either wholly wicked or wholly redemptive.

'Kakaro Āṛme' ('Under Someone's Cover') brings together village life, rumour, the prospect of theft and robbery, police presence, and collective fear. The village

public sphere is not simply a space of trust but a complicated stage of identification and accusation. Asking whose 'cover' or protection is involved is not solely a matter of finding a criminal; it also concerns whom a person can call their own in conditions of insecurity. The formation of assumptions before evidence is available becomes a source of the story's pointed satire.

9. 'Mandākinī': The Memory of Home and the Erosion of Relationships

'Mandākinī' is among the collection's works that throw subtle psychological light upon social reality. A familial situation, the rare stillness of night, comparisons of old and new relationships, and the structural decay of the home transform one another's meaning. Here the house is not merely a physical object: it stores memory, duty, unfulfilled promises, and mutual expectations. The parallel between cracks in the house and fissures in relationships becomes a principal aesthetic device.

Memory in this story does not innocently glorify the past. Recollection also restores economic incompletion, failed repairs to the house, and the pain of distance from relatives. The story's inner movement is governed more by the sequence of thoughts and the movement of memory than by external events. The reader sees one domestic situation from two perspectives: present anxiety and past expectation. In this way, 'Mandākinī' challenges sentimental conventions surrounding the home in Maithili fiction.

One artistic limitation can be identified in the tendency of descriptions to lengthen as layers of experience accumulate, sometimes slowing the plot's momentum. Yet this slowness is not merely laxity: it makes palpable the character's inability to move beyond the confines of his own mind. Because of this doubleness, the story partly justifies its length.

10. 'Ijotme Herāyal Loksabh': The Crowd, Popular Movement, and Hunger

'Ijotme Herāyal Loksabh' ('People Lost in the Light') presents a vast procession through the city, slogans, clamour, and the spectacle of popular struggle. But the fundamental question at the centre of the scene is not the number of people in the crowd; it is the actual condition of the hungry human beings within it. The story establishes a sharp contrast between the public radiance of protest and the emptiness of an individual's stomach. Collective vocality cannot by itself end the private starvation of poor people. This question supplies the story's satirical energy.

The image of 'light' in the title is crucial. Light makes things visible, but not all human beings are seen equally; some become invisible even in its brightest centre. The story neither rejects popular movements outright nor assures us that collective action is liberating by definition. It asks how clearly the most deprived

experience of life can be heard amid the loud voices of representation. Despite its small scale, it leaves open profound possibilities for social criticism.

11. 'Didval': Media, the Mind, and a Changing Domestic World

The title story, 'Didval', opens in the atmosphere of a single night. The television programme has ended; amid the stillness of the house, personal solitude, and ordinary routine, uncomfortable thoughts arise in the narrator's mind. A booklet, old memories, financial burdens, changing habits of eating, and questions about domestic relationships gradually construct this mental landscape. Although modern media have brought more of the outside world into the home, they have not made inward dialogue any easier.

Narrative time appears limited, but psychological time is expanded. The character's present sensations are continually filled by earlier incidents, possible futures, and memories of humiliation. Although relatively few external events occur, instability steadily increases. Such temporal dilation is a familiar technique of psychological fiction, but Prabhas gives it a distinctive local voice through the concrete vocabulary of Maithili domestic practice, food and drink, expenditure, and family forms of address.

It is difficult to confine the title's meaning to a single dictionary definition. If it is read within the story as suggesting the disrupted coordination of life, that reading connects with the central subject. Yet the title remains open to the reader's experience, and this is an achievement. The story does not promote some imagined ideal of 'modernity'; it shows that material convenience and inner peace are two different things.

12. 'Khūnī': Rural Illness, Fear, and Delayed Institutions

In 'Khūnī' ('Bloody'), sudden illness and the limited availability of medical care in rural life generate the story's initial tension. An unwell young man, the family's anxiety, hope of reaching hospital, and uncertainty about medicines and treatment transform illness from an exclusively private misfortune into a question addressed to public systems. As the distance grows between bodily suffering and administrative indifference, the narrative becomes increasingly frightening.

The title has the sharp sound of 'blood', but its critical importance lies less in a direct portrayal of violence than in recognising a social situation in which responsibility for the loss of life is dispersed. Who is culpable: only the person immediately present, or also the system that treats an emergency as normal? Here the story's realist energy assumes the form of an ethical dilemma. It has the capacity to transform readers' sympathy into indignation.

13. ‘Pativratā’: Patriarchy, the Body, and the Unequal Politics of Labour

‘Pativratā’ (‘The Devoted Wife’) exposes the contradictions of village labour arrangements, impoverished households, and moral rules imposed upon women's lives by men. In the experiences of such characters as Sunari and Parma, the language of family protection comes into conflict with the economic dependence that constricts women's capacity to decide. Fields, landowners, wage labour, harsh conditions such as floods, and everyday work give the narrative its social ground. ‘Pativratā’ is not merely a word praising an individual's character; the story scrutinises the social use of that word.

When professions of respect for women do not provide real safety, food, rest, or the right to speak, the pretence behind the ideal is exposed. It would be mistaken here to read marriage or family relationships in isolation from society's economic hierarchy. At times a woman's wishes emerge clearly in dialogue; elsewhere her silence or resistance communicates the severity of circumstances. Prabhas's significant intervention is to question the conventional meaning of ‘pativratā’ and disclose the social costs borne in women's lives.

The presentation of women's experiences is not, however, beyond criticism. The tendency to view women's suffering through the perceptions of male characters can sometimes restrict women's direct expression of their own experience. Noting this limit does not diminish the dignity of female characters; it draws necessary attention to the difference between narrative viewpoint and subject matter.

14. ‘Aṣṭāvakrak Śeṣ Kathā’: Pilgrimage, Hierarchy, and Collective Delusion

The collection's final long story, ‘Aṣṭāvakrak Śeṣ Kathā’ (‘The Remaining Story of Ashtavakra’), begins with a group scene on a religious pilgrimage. The form of address ‘Bam’ attached to names, devotees' enthusiasm, travel arrangements, the route, exchanges among the travelling party, and discussion of local relationships gradually form a many-charactered world. The narrative repeatedly overturns the easy assumption that participation in a religious group makes everyone equal: differences of prestige, economic standing, dependence, and humiliation remain within the company of pilgrims.

The interactions of Sardar, Tribhuvan, Mahadev, and other companions turn the pilgrimage into a moving social laboratory. Where a journey to a deity is associated with claims to personal purification, social conduct on the ground retains its old divisions of rank, prejudice, and mutual arrogance. The author does not simply write an anti-religious slogan; his target is the contradiction between the public language of worship and the opposite direction of everyday behaviour.

The long narrative moves through roads, halts, arguments among the party, and the arrival of news from home. Polyphonic dialogue prevents the reader from remaining tied to the consciousness of one central hero. This method lends the story a collective theatricality. The invocation of 'Ashtavakra' in the title opens interpretative possibilities: inner crookedness rather than external deformity, inconsistencies of conduct, and the question of self-knowledge. Yet the reference need not be taken as a literal rewriting of the classical Ashtavakra narrative; the principal available evidence concerns this story's independent narrative form of social and ethical irony.

The work's expansiveness is both its achievement and its limitation. Travelling alongside numerous characters, the story creates a multi-layered image of society, although the proliferation of episodes sometimes relaxes its central dramatic tension. For readers seeking only a final 'message', the dispersal may appear an obstacle; those who examine the full range of conduct within the pilgrim community will find in that very breadth the social reach of the work.

15. Narrative Method: Dialogue, Viewpoint, and the Transformation of Time

In Prabhas's dialogue, the hierarchies of Maithili society speak for themselves. Through the choice of 'ham', 'toṃ', and 'ahā̃', forms of address, immediate replies, and silences, characters express their social distances. The same sentence spoken by an officer becomes an order; from an elder of the family, it may become advice or a threat; from a helpless person, it becomes a plea. To level these linguistic differences would destroy the social pulse of the stories.

Third-person narration is widespread throughout the collection, but in many episodes the narrator moves very close to a particular character's experience. Movement between external scenes and inward responses supplies narrative energy. The expansion of remembered time in 'Didval' and 'Mandākinī', the momentary incident in 'Viśeṣādhikār', the collective spectacle in 'Ijotme Herāyal Loksabh', and the journey with multiple characters in 'Aṣṭāvakrak Śeṣ Kathā' demonstrate the author's experimentation.

Prabhas often refuses to make the end of a story into a complete resolution. Certain decisive moments recur in the reader's mind precisely because the social arrangements remain unchanged. Alongside this openness, the author's commitment to justice is sometimes expressed so clearly that the reader's freedom to construct meaning may narrow. The collection should not be treated indiscriminately as an example of a uniform narrative technique. Its actual form is a confluence of stories of different lengths, rhythms, and kinds of authorial intervention.

16. Symbol and Structure: The House, Road, Body, Darkness, and Light

Objects are not simply backgrounds in the narrative world of Didval. A crumbling house wall, closed room, unappealing food, winter clothing, application papers, a load carried on the shoulder, a road, and a crowd become concrete expressions of social relationships. In 'Mandākinī', the structure of the house turns into memory; in 'Punarāvṛtti', the closed room gives shape to mental obstruction; in 'Yātrā: Herāyal Bāṭpar', the road signifies both possibility and impediment; in 'Viśeṣādhikār', paper signals administrative supremacy over bodily needs.

The metaphors of light and darkness establish a particularly revealing dialogue among these stories. The social scene in 'Dharatī Kuhari Uṭhal', the public brightness of 'Ijotme Herāyal Loksabh', and the nocturnal silence of 'Didval' all raise the question of seeing: who sees, who remains unseen, and who has the power to change what is seen? These questions allow the separate story titles to interpret one another.

17. The Conjunction of Class, Caste, Gender, and Moral Resistance

Poverty in this collection is not a static backdrop; it is a structure of power within relationships. The words of those with money, land, office, or connections carry greater weight, while the experiences of labourers, the sick, dependants, and solitary people can be dismissed by the system as 'exceptions'. Signs of rural social hierarchy appear in many stories. Yet it would be without context to subsume every form of oppression under a definite caste label: caste, class, office, and gender have different proportions in different instances of dominance. The credibility of critical analysis depends on preserving those distinctions.

The experiences of female characters form a central part of this power structure. Waiting, the incompleteness of household life, the invisible burden of labour, the pressure of social propriety, and bodily insecurity cannot be separated out as merely 'family' matters. 'Pativratā' and 'Mandākinī' especially demonstrate the links between domestic crisis and the public economy. In reading women's silence, we should not automatically regard it as consent; equally, to declare every silence a form of resistance would be simplistic. Meaning must be derived from the particular situation.

The author's ethical vision favours the oppressed, but this alone is not success. Success comes when a story makes the reader examine the grounds of judgement before deciding. In the collection's strongest works, disclosing the frailty of characters does not reduce sympathy but gives that sympathy human complexity.

18. Aesthetic Achievements and Critical Limitations

The collection's first achievement is its social breadth. Village, small town, office, home, educational institution, hospital, public crowd, and religious pilgrimage become a shared narrative world. Its second achievement is the adjustment of form to theme: the concise thrust of 'Viśeṣādhikār' differs from the memory-rich expansiveness of 'Mandākinī', while the multi-character structure of 'Aṣṭāvakrak Śeṣ Kathā' differs from both. A third achievement is the local credibility of dialogue and the changing voices of characters according to their social positions.

Among its critical limitations are occasionally predictable social conclusions, sometimes unnecessary explanatory passages, and restricted inner lives for some secondary characters. When the storyteller's commitments become too explicit, an episode risks turning into an illustration of a thesis rather than remaining open to readers. Conversely, lingering too long within a character's mind slows the external dramatic rhythm in certain works. These limitations do not invalidate the collection; they indicate genuine tensions in its craft.

A further distinctive literary value lies in the fact that modernity does not mean linear 'progress' in these stories. Education, transport, television, offices, and public organisations have arrived, but human insecurity and the breakdown of relationships have not diminished. The author depicts new arrangements while asking whose lives actually receive their benefits. This question enables the collection to address present-day readers beyond its own historical moment.

19. Conclusion

To regard Didval merely as a posthumous short-story collection, and consequently as a historical monument, would undervalue its living literary force. Across these twenty stories, unceasing pressures upon human life assume different forms: the ethical question of writing fiction on a competition platform, an office application, the crossing of a river, silence within a house, a hungry crowd, ownership relations in the fields, and collective conduct on pilgrimage. This diversity of subject is in fact the many forms of one fundamental inquiry: how does a human being preserve dignity and judgement under unequal conditions?

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary's approach to fiction moves between compassion and satire, sympathy and scepticism, visible social reality and inner pain. Many of his stories make an urgent demand for social justice; at their best they move beyond slogans to create recognisable human situations. For this reason Didval is not simply a record of social history in the study of modern Maithili short fiction. It is a major literary text for understanding the interactions of language, memory, power, relationships, and narrative craft.

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SECTION TWO · SHORT-STORY COLLECTIONS / REVIEW 7

7. Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary's Kathā-Prabhās: Transformations of Society, the Individual, and Narrative Craft across Three Decades of Maithili Short Fiction

A Research-Based Literary Review

Abstract

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary's Kathā-Prabhās brings three successive phases of Maithili short fiction into confrontation within a single book. Published by the Maithili Academy, the collection is divided into three sections designated the seventh, eighth, and ninth decades, containing fourteen, seven, and seven stories respectively. This essay concerns itself not only with their plots but also with the narrator's position, the interaction of village and town, tensions within families and between generations, the everyday effects of institutions of power, the forms of letters and dialogue, the inflections of humour and satire, the representation of women, and the expanding meanings of symbolic titles. Stories including Liphāph Band: Chiṭṭhī Khūjal, Girgiṭ, Dinacharyā, Pitā, Malāhak Ṭol, Purān Charitrak Nav Kathā, Sthānāntaraṇ, Vikalāṅg, Bāṛhi, and Rakṣak demonstrate how Chaudhary's fictional world proceeds from direct representations of social relations towards more intricate configurations of self-examination, institutional criticism, and moral unease. This change is not a linear progression: earlier experiences return in altered circumstances. His strengths lie in natural, conversational Maithili, self-critical narration, and the subtle contradictions of ordinary life; his limitations sometimes emerge from explanatory narration, prolixity, and a predominantly male-centred perspective. Taken as a whole, Kathā-Prabhās can be read as a critical record both of the social mentality of Maithili-speaking society in the latter half of the twentieth century and of its evolving narrative art.

Keywords: Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary; Maithili short fiction; Kathā-Prabhās; three decades; narrative technique; village society; family; institutional power; satire; modernity.

1. Introduction: The Central Question of the Collection

Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary's fictional world cannot be reduced to reminiscences of village life or reflections of a changing urban existence. His stories arise where a person's claims about himself collide with the truths disclosed by his conduct. An individual may consider himself liberal, just, reasonable, or modern; yet his self-image becomes unstable under the pressures of family relations, caste discipline, everyday fear, and unexpected opportunity. It is this gap that particularly engages the writer. The importance of Kathā-Prabhās therefore

resides not simply in gathering different stories together but in a narrative vision capable of identifying the self-contradictions of a changing society.

The book's subtitle, Three Decades of Representative Maithili Short Fiction, invites expectations of a historical survey. The word 'representative', however, requires careful qualification. It does not mean that an impartial survey of every year's literary tendencies is being offered. Rather, selected works by one author outline the lived experiences and experiments in form of three periods. Attention must therefore be paid to the sequence of the works, the construction of their titles, changing narrative situations, and variations in narrative voice. When describing the writer's literary development, it is equally important to distinguish sociological transformations of the period from his personal artistic decisions.

The collection was published by the Maithili Academy, Patna. In his publisher's note, Devkant Jha discusses the writer's rural and urban experiences, his realism concerning a changing society, and his broad human outlook. In the preface, Phanindra Nath Ojha draws attention to the range of experience and social consciousness represented by the stories. These contemporary statements of appreciation offer directions for readers, not definitive critical verdicts. The present review tests their affirmative expectations against the stories' own procedures, ironies, and linguistic restraint.

2. The Organisation of Three Decades: Constructing Literary Time

The section assigned to the seventh decade contains Liphāph Band: Chiṭṭhī Khūjal; Ṭūṭal Kalam: Labharal Ākhar; Subhadrā-Haraṇ; Gay Biṛhnī: Tohar Ḍaṅk; Uparphāṭū; Girgiṭ; Klānt; Dinacharyā; Asādhya; Araganī; Sūryāsta; Anachihār Appan; Dhamkī; and Dukh. The eighth-decade section includes Yuddha-Virām; Pitā; Uttarakāṇḍ; Ḍhep; Malāhak Ṭol; Purān Charitrak Nav Kathā; and Bhayākrānt. The ninth-decade section comprises Ekālāp; Indradhanush; Sthānāntaraṇ; Bajraṅgak Potā; Vikalāṅg; Bāṛhi; and Rakṣak. This orderly division into periods is itself the first basis for critical examination.

Many titles in the first group disclose complex relationships between feeling, things, and human conduct: the envelope, the pen, a sting, the chameleon, a clothesline, and sunset. In the second, war, fatherhood, the later book of an epic, a neighbourhood, an old character, and fear suggest intensifying pressures between personal relationships and the collectivity. In the third, the monologue, transfer, disability, flood, and protector bring questions of the individual, institutions, crisis, and protection more explicitly into view. Titles alone cannot determine the full meaning of stories; nevertheless, this sequence of titles suggests a shift in the centres of the fictional world.

One critical advantage of the three-part arrangement is that the same social term can be observed acquiring different meanings over time. In the first part, the village chiefly appears as an intimate environment of life and reciprocal scrutiny; in the middle part, as a structure bound to lineage, memory, and

collective authority; and in the later part, through its connections with offices, appointments, administrative intervention, and wider public crises. Village and town must not, however, be read as separate worlds: in Chaudhary's fiction the practices of each continually enter the other.

The stories within any one period are not formally uniform. Some are marked by intense first-person self-disclosure, others by dialogue, satirical situations, or relatively expansive social episodes. It would be misleading to convert this variety into a simple ascent from 'early realism' to 'late modernism'. A more defensible conclusion is that, as the periods changed, the questions posed by the fiction became more closely interconnected and multilayered, while the writer revisited several older concerns in new forms.

3. The Envelope, the Pen, and the Storyteller's Self-Examination

At the beginning of Liphāph Band: Chiṭṭhī Khūjal, an envelope lying on a table and the process of opening it become the central narrative devices. The envelope brings not merely information but an address, memories, expectations, and an occasion for self-appraisal. An ordinary moment of correspondence opens onto an extended social psychology. The writer makes a commonplace object a means of uncovering many layers of the mind. Between the envelope's 'closed' state and the letter's 'opened' state, the reader's curiosity and the narrator's instinct for self-defence are activated together.

Similarly, in Ṭūṭal Kalam: Labharal Ākhar, the implement of writing and the instability of language become complementary metaphors. The breaking of the pen does more than interrupt writing: it calls into question the right to speak for oneself, the credibility of feeling, and the propriety of expression. The title links physical breakage with the disorder of 'letters' or written characters. This duality permits the reader to understand a personal experience as a reflection upon language itself. The tendency to introduce the problem of writing stories into their own subject matter is particularly notable in Chaudhary's early fiction.

These two works call for a necessary caution: a first-person statement should not automatically be treated as the author's personal confession. The narrator selects what he sees; what he withholds also generates meaning. Chaudhary's narrative skill operates in this unspoken space. A light tone of humour frequently exposes the contradictions of self-satisfaction. The narration seems to flow like an informal conversation, yet beneath its ease lie persistent anxieties about self-confidence and the desire for social approval.

4. Village Power, Relationships, and Changing Colours

In Gay Biṛhnī: Tohar Ḍaṅk, the image of a 'sting' brings together personal resentment and the consequences of social humiliation. The injury is not confined to an immediate dispute: it survives in memory. Conversational incidents, rejoinders, and the agility of everyday speech produce an atmosphere in which an argument becomes public while the wound it inflicts remains

private. The title's aggressive address likewise suggests that the story explores not only external events but reactions and the concealed violence of relationships.

In Uparphāṭū, the spatial divisions of the village and the weave of personal relations provide the story's practical foundation. Movements between places, pathways, the recognition of houses, and people's shared knowledge make its world concrete. Place here is not picturesque scenery but a social force regulating conduct: who may approach whom, whose words carry weight, and who struggles to preserve a position. Differences of prestige and marginality are visible within the geography of the village.

In Girgiṭ, the familiar metaphor of changing colours becomes a means of reading people's opportunistic conduct. Beneath the warmth apparent in conversation lie interests, self-seeking, fear, and attitudes altered to suit circumstances. It is therefore inadequate to regard Girgiṭ simply as a caricature of one hypocritical character. The idea of changing colours becomes a collective problem of individual and social relationships: loyalty is never assured, and the worth of a promise is repeatedly redefined by circumstances.

Klānt and Dinacharyā reveal more elusive forms of mental fatigue and monotony within the ordinary course of living. At the opening of Klānt, the convergence of sound, newspaper, and anxiety fragments the world of experience. In Dinacharyā, the repetition of the day and the tones of public conversation obscure questions arising within a character. In both stories time is not merely measured by the clock; it is a burden borne by the mind. The presence of such inner exhaustion in the early group adds a psychological dimension to the writer's social vision.

In the village life of Asādhya, discussion of illness, crisis, or difficulty reveals a distance between social reaction and individual experience. The opening expression 'Nothing like this had ever happened before' brings ordinary collective assumptions into view. A person's problem may become a subject of communal discussion without that discussion necessarily attending to the sufferer's private experience. The story's compassionate tenor emerges from this distance. The reader recognises that the closeness of a community offers no guarantee of sensitivity.

5. Araganī, Sūryāsta, and Anachihār Appan: Crisis within Everyday Life

The material world of Araganī consists of small household needs, deprivation, and the unseen labour of living. Making an ordinary domestic article central to a story indicates Chaudhary's literary democracy: experiences rarely illuminated by the glory of heroic action are acknowledged as worthy of narration. The coexistence of laughter and embarrassment in the account of deprivation prevents facile sentimentality. The relation between objects and people asks whether poverty means only a lack of resources or also an unending struggle to retain dignity.

In Sūryāsta, the setting sun ceases to be a decorative image of time's ending and becomes a sign of ageing, memory, absence, and the weariness of relationships. At the beginning of the story, the presence of Paresh Babu and an awareness of home and family bring the reader to a point in life where the past always affects how the present is seen. Instead of introducing an abrupt dramatic reversal, the writer gives importance to the slow pressure of time. Thus a private experience also touches a wider generational feeling.

The title Anachihār Appan contains contradictory sentiments: someone 'one's own' has become unrecognisable. The emotional intimacy of 'one's own' collides with the estrangement of 'unfamiliar' within a single expression. In the story, this opposition opens a path towards understanding the social construction of identity. Why do people who belong to a village, relationship, or remembered past experience estrangement? The story places such questions within everyday conduct. The outward continuation of a relationship does not prove its inner stability—one of the collection's recurring insights.

In Dhamkī and Dukh, fear, familial insecurity, and emotional injury grow more intense. Through the flow of dialogue, Dhamkī shows how words spoken within a relationship can become instruments of pressure before any action is taken. The extended episodes of Dukh present a tangled conjunction of personal suffering, local opinion, and communal advice. That suffering cannot be confined to a single dramatic incident. The writer renders vividly the tension between society's explanations of distress and the individual's unspoken pain.

6. Stories of the Eighth Decade: Family, Memory, and Generational Questions

The title of the eighth-decade section's opening story, Yuddha-Virām ('Ceasefire'), suggests external conflict and temporary peace. Family relations, attitudes towards marriage, and differences between generations form important ground for the narrative. A 'pause' is not an 'end'; it contains the possibility that conflict will arise again. Chaudhary avoids treating domestic confrontation as entirely private, for a family cannot make its decisions apart from village reputation and social practice.

Pitā ('Father') may be read as the emotional centre of this section. In its opening, the village, tenuous relationships, a letter, and questions of social identity are interwoven. Fatherhood is not simply a title of authority: it contains insecurity, expectations, incapacity, and an attachment to one's children that cannot readily be expressed. Chaudhary does not read the father-son relationship through a flat formula of idealisation. He places familial memory within the struggle between human closeness and social propriety.

The title Uttarakāṇḍ is especially significant because of its cultural memory. The word, denoting the later book of the Rāmāyaṇa, immediately calls to mind the instability following victory and questions of justice and renunciation. By invoking this name, Chaudhary makes a new interpretative context possible for

contemporary conduct. It would oversimplify the work to call it a direct mythological retelling. What matters more is that a familiar cultural title awakens readers' moral expectations and confronts them with contemporary events.

In Ḍhep, the writer draws upon the inventiveness of village speech and relationships among characters to construct a complex picture of social hierarchy. The object's literal meaning is not sufficient: its very ordinariness opens symbolic possibilities concerning the appraisal and belittlement of human beings. The story leads towards the question of the criteria by which society declares people greater or lesser and how labour, caste, prestige, and vulnerability interact in the making of a life.

Malāhak Ṭol ('The Boatmen's Neighbourhood') establishes a social geography in its very title. A neighbourhood is more than a residential boundary: it denotes traditional occupation, social distance, labour, and community identity. To place in the foreground a locality whose residents are commonly pushed to the margins of mainstream village portraits is a meaningful choice. The critical issue is not to transform their lives into an image of romantic dignity, but to ask how fully the writer represents their circumstances, voices, and experiences of justice and injustice.

Purān Charitrak Nav Kathā ('A New Story of an Old Character') is a self-conscious title. The opposition between 'old' and 'new' opens the possibilities of memory, the repetition of social roles, and the rereading of an earlier narrative in the language of the present. A character is not merely a named individual: he or she enacts certain roles inherited from society. The 'new story' interrogates those roles anew. At this point, Chaudhary's fiction appears to regard history not simply as recurrence but as a process through which the present reconstructs meaning.

Bhayākrānt ('Gripped by Fear') lends the eighth-decade section a grave tone of apprehension. Fear is not merely an instinct for survival; social judgement, loss of reputation, the family's future, and uncertain decisions also produce it. Anxieties within the mind accompany outward conduct. The middle section thus becomes more closely concerned with social interpretations of personal experience: the individual's 'we' continually collides with the family's 'we' and the 'we' imposed by the community.

7. The Ninth Decade: From Monologue to Institutional Power

The ninth-decade section begins with Ekālāp ('Monologue'). The title foregrounds narrative voice: even in a world of dialogue, a person may go on speaking in a solitary voice within himself. Its opening receives an ordinary scene and experience through first-person observation. Unfolding one's thoughts before the reader is not complete self-transparency; it also involves a selective order of memory, discomfort, and reasoning. The monologue's structure therefore demands scrutiny rather than automatic assent from the reader.

In Indradhanush ('Rainbow'), the possibilities of colour and the image of changing light must be read against the tensions of the wider fictional world. Although the rainbow signifies fleeting beauty, it is no lasting solution. Where characters and relationships are hemmed in by everyday inequality, the experience of colour provides a brief space in which to imagine a future. Chaudhary makes such an image symbolic, but its meaning cannot be separated from the concrete circumstances of life. Hope and instability are present together in this reading.

Sthānāntaraṇ ('Transfer') is among the later section's most important titles concerning institutions. A change of posting is more than the administrative execution of an office order: an individual relates it to social connections, responsibilities at home, reputation, and psychological security. The narrator's responses to everyday working culture, petitions, decisions, and networks of influence reveal the complexity of authority. On paper, an institution operates according to uniform rules; within it, people constantly seek informal routes through access, acquaintance, and fear. The story becomes critical precisely in this gap between formal procedure and actual practice.

The name Bajraṅgak Potā ('Bajrang's Grandson') carries particular social meanings of lineage, family memory, and generational succession. A grandson may be regarded not merely as another family member but as the future bearer of an old prestige or unfinished task. Yet how much room is left for the individual's own wishes in such a construction of inheritance? This question offers a useful perspective on the story. The title invites critical examination of the tendency to define human worth through descent rather than independent personhood.

In the setting of Vikalāṅg ('Disabled'), examinations, the search for work, office conduct, and questions about capability come to the fore. It would be wrong to convert 'disability' carelessly into nothing more than a metaphor for physical incapacity. Readers must distinguish the character's actual circumstances from the assumptions society imposes upon that person. Institutional neglect, concerns about self-respect, and unequal opportunity become all the more deserving of scrutiny. Satire is meaningful when directed against unjust expectations and social cruelty, not against the individual.

Bāṛhi ('Flood') brings into view a human crisis inseparable from Mithila's geographical life. Water does not simply become a crisis all at once: the experience of flooding raises questions of relief, movement, household survival, livelihood, and structures of communal assistance. Inequality stands exposed during a natural disaster, for not everyone possesses the same dwelling, means, or capacity to survive. Read in the context of Chaudhary's broader social vision, this story makes clear that environmental events and administrative responses cannot be understood separately.

The final story, Rakṣak ('Protector'), gathers into its title the dual possibilities of protection and control. At the beginning, an office setting, a period of waiting,

and personal unease are established. 'Protector' is not an inherently virtuous designation. Who protects whom, and on the strength of whose authority is such protection possible? These questions lie at the centre of the critique. The movement from letters and private uncertainty at the collection's beginning towards institutional practices and questions of power near its end forms a meaningful structural arc.

8. Letters, Voices, and Silence: Elements of Narration

In many of Chaudhary's stories, letters, written notices, papers, tables, and offices are not dispensable objects whose removal would leave the plot unchanged. They mediate between human beings and power. A letter can preserve an intimate relationship and also reveal absence; a document may confer entitlement or become evidence of helplessness. From Liphāph Band: Chiṭṭhī Khūjal to Sthānāntaraṇ, this sequence of objects indicates how the social meaning of communication changes over the collection's historical span.

The narrator's voice often appears unaffected, as though he were relating his experience to someone sitting in front of him. Yet this seeming intimacy of direct address conceals selected information, leaps in memory, and the complexity of unresolved judgements. Sometimes narration serves self-defence, sometimes confession; at times the reader sympathises with the narrator, while at others the limitations of his perspective become open to question. These double possibilities give the collection's first-person voices their dynamism.

Chaudhary's achievement in dialogue is distinctive. Characters reveal social rank, deferential distance, intimacy, practical folk wisdom, and arrogance through their speech. Conversation does more than move the plot forward: it is itself a social act. A brief remark can alter another person's standing; a joke can become an insult; silence can carry more significance than overt dissent. The use of such subtle differences within spoken Maithili sets his narrative art apart from conventionally formal literary prose.

9. Narrative Time, Memory, and the Construction of Scenes

The use of narrative time is not merely a matter of answering when an event occurred. In some stories, rain, evening, daily routine, or the progression of an office day regulates a character's state of mind. The evening of Sūryāsta, the repetitions of Dinacharyā, and the inner time of Ekālāp share a common principle: external time moves at one rate, while different individuals experience it at different speeds. Consequently, narrative slowness is sometimes an appropriate artistic choice and sometimes raises critical questions about the elaboration of an episode.

Memory in Chaudhary's stories is not simply a trustworthy archive. In recalling the past, a person often constructs arguments for the present. Father-son relations, village reputation, earlier acquaintances, and social expectations are reorganised in remembrance. Reading Pitā, Purān Charitrak Nav Kathā, and

Anachihār Appan together reveals that memory may itself become a field of conflict. A past regarded as golden by one person may have been experienced as oppression or dispossession by another.

The writer often refuses to draw a sharp line between the visual worlds of village and city. Urban education, employment, and the prestige of offices enter the village, while rural personal ties, acquaintances, and inherited notions of honour and dishonour remain active in the city. This mutual penetration is an important sign of modern Mithila's transformation. Chaudhary's social geography is not a static map, but a configuration of people, information, opportunity, and interdependence in constant motion.

10. Women Characters, Family, and the Limits of Perspective

Works including Subhadrā-Haraṇ, Yuddha-Virām, Pitā, and Dukh offer opportunities to question women's social positions through the organisation of families and the circumstances of marriage. Two levels must be distinguished: the woman's position in the fictional world and the perspective through which the narrator himself describes it. A male character's anguish is not invariably synonymous with the complete social truth. To treat a woman's silence as consent or to make her merely an adjunct to male experience would be unacceptable as critical practice.

Chaudhary's fictional world frequently positions women amid family propriety, generational honour, and social decision-making. This arrangement may represent a reality of the fictional subject matter, but it can also disclose limits in the narrative perspective. How much scope is granted to women's desires, dissent, labour, and experiences beyond prescribed constraints? Asking this question enriches a fresh reading of the collection. Recognising the writer's accomplishments does not require supposing that every story already satisfies all the demands of contemporary gender justice.

A balanced judgement is needed. Depicting a character under social constraint does not itself imply authorial endorsement; nevertheless, it remains appropriate to examine the choices and opportunities for speech allowed that character by the narrative. From this standpoint, Kathā-Prabhās becomes more than a historical document: it is reactivated by the critical questions of contemporary readers.

11. Class, Caste, Occupation, and the Local Public Sphere

It would be a critical mistake to describe the collection's social world as an undifferentiated 'Maithil society'. Within the village there are differences in resources, occupation, prestige, and the right to speak. The title Malāhak Ṭol directs attention to an occupational community and spatial segregation; domestic deprivation in Araganī and judgements of social worth in Ḍhep expose socioeconomic distance at different levels. Read together, these stories unsettle any romantic picture of ordinary village life.

In examining caste and class, criticism must distinguish facts, narrative voice, and implications. The mere naming of a neighbourhood or occupation does not establish every political consequence of the writer's perspective. Even so, their presence shows that Chaudhary's village is not merely a gathering place for the respectable elite. Working communities, households struggling with scarce resources, and people standing at the margins of public life enter his narrative field. The worth of this expansion can be assessed by the standards both of literary form and of social justice.

The role of public opinion also demands attention. Gossip, quasi-panchayat deliberations, discussions at doorways, news of employment, and proposals for marriage regulate people's behaviour in these stories. This local public sphere is often more powerful than written rules. It can turn an individual's private decision into a matter of social judgement. Chaudhary's satire marks the contradiction whereby people collectively proclaim moral principles while privately calculating advantage, relationships, and opportunity.

12. The Ethical Work of Humour and Satire

Chaudhary's satire is seldom detached from compassion. An eccentric character may provoke laughter, but that conduct soon discloses an underlying social fear or insecurity. In Girgiṭ, Dhamkī, Klānt, and several dialogue-centred stories, satire operates through this double movement. A character's utterance comes to stand against his professed ideal. The writer relies less on explicit moral instruction than on situations and verbal irony.

Satire has its limits too. When readers become mere spectators of a character's humiliation, the social causes of the conduct may disappear from sight. In Chaudhary's stronger passages, however, laughter turns back upon the reader: in those we regard as clever, socially adept, or 'normal', we recognise our society's own double standards. This reflective satire raises fiction above an ephemeral joke and gives it literary value.

13. Language: The Social Voices and Artistic Inflections of Maithili

One of Kathā-Prabhās's most substantial achievements is its many-sided use of narrative Maithili. The ease of local speech in sentences, differences of status conveyed through dialogue, intimate modes of address in narration, and intermittent commentary within the plot all combine in its language. To call this language merely 'simple' would overlook its structural capacities. Within one language, the writer creates distinct registers of self-criticism, informal argument, mockery, sympathy, and distrust.

A particular feature of the narrative language is its orientation towards oral flow. Reading it, one senses a narrator periodically addressing listeners before returning to the principal incident. This practice enters into dialogue with the Maithili tradition of conversational storytelling, yet it is more than a transcript of spoken words. The writer makes familiar expressions artistic through

selection, sequence, and repetition. Such techniques draw readers closer, although the extension of certain episodes sometimes weakens narrative concentration.

The movement between rural and urban linguistic registers is also meaningful. When terms associated with jobs, offices, documents, decisions, and administration enter the language of familial address, the language itself becomes evidence of social change. Without direct political declarations, the collision between the colour of everyday speech and bureaucratic formality expresses the contradictions of modern life. Here the writer's linguistic sensitivity becomes a form of social criticism.

14. Symbols, Titles, and Cultural Memory

Chaudhary's construction of titles deserves critical study in its own right. Girgiṭ suggests changes of colour; Araganī, the domestic sphere; Sūryāsta, decline; Indradhanush, fleeting brightness; Bāṛhi, an insecure geography; and Rakṣak, the duality of protective and controlling power. Yet the meaning of a symbol cannot be confined to a dictionary definition. Only as the narrative develops the thing's material situation, people's actions, and the narrator's responses does the symbol acquire living significance.

Titles such as Subhadrā-Haraṇ, Uttarakāṇḍ, and Purān Charitrak Nav Kathā especially raise the question of how cultural memory is employed. Familiar names drawn from tradition exert a pressure of expectation upon contemporary behaviour. The writer sometimes sustains that expectation and sometimes overturns it. The final meaning of a story cannot be determined solely by the mythological origins of its title: its present social circumstances and narrative voice give the name fresh significance. Modern Maithili fiction thereby creates room to criticise tradition even while working from within it.

15. Critical Limitations: Uncomfortable Questions amid the Achievements

A first limitation concerns the expansion of narrative voice. The naturalness of oral storytelling is often a source of narrative energy; in some passages, however, continual commentary, self-explanation, and repetition diminish the plot's force. When the narrator additionally explains what characters might have made evident through their actions, readers have less space to form independent conclusions. This issue arises particularly when one reads the longer episodes of dialogue-centred stories.

A second limitation is the uneven reach of the social perspective. The fiction achieves depth in portraying male self-conflict, public conduct, and family prestige; yet women's independent inner lives, working people's voices, and the full experiences of those subjected to institutions are not disclosed with equal depth throughout. This criticism does not negate the collection's historical

accomplishment. Rather, it makes clearer the cultural position and contemporary limits of its vision.

A third question concerns the representation of reality. The division into three decades provides a framework for tracing the development of the writing, but does not automatically establish that the book represents all of contemporary Maithil society. The recurrence of certain experiences and absence of others are natural in works selected from a single writer's output. It is therefore more reasonable to regard Kathā-Prabhās as multifaceted literary evidence of a particular vision than as an obligatory paradigm of an entire age.

A fourth limitation arises from expectations created by symbolic titles. A title may promise vast implications, but when the story does not achieve comparable formal density, readers sense a disparity. Such a criticism should not be applied indiscriminately. In judging individual stories, however, the relationship between the promise of the title and the shape of the narrative must be considered.

16. Place in Literary History and Overall Assessment

The literary-historical position of Kathā-Prabhās derives from its declared scope across three decades and the linguistic richness of Maithili social fiction. This book is not an uninterrupted display of a single mode. Inner monologue, dialogue in spoken language, family tensions, mythological names placed in new contexts, social satire, and stories of institutional conduct appear together. This diversity establishes Chaudhary not as a writer confined to a single subject but as one attentive to the changing centres of experience.

The form of modernity in Chaudhary's fiction is particularly important. Modernity here is not merely the arrival of the city, schooling, or employment; it is the struggle of individual will, the instability of older relationships, the mediation of decisions by institutions, and a sense of weakening social trust. Drawing a line from Pitā to Sthānāntaraṇ, or from Araganī to Bāṛhi, reveals how familial and material insecurity become connected with public structures. The collection's social meaning expands because it brings these connections into view.

The fact that Chaudhary's later work Prabhāsak Kathā received the Sahitya Akademi's Maithili award provides a wider context of literary recognition; it would be erroneous, however, to treat that honour as an award made directly to Kathā-Prabhās. The value of this collection must be determined through its own organisation, narrative language, and effects upon readers. Institutional recognition helps explain its historical standing; it does not replace artistic judgement.

Ultimately, the ethical force of Chaudhary's short fiction resides not in declarations about the welfare of society as a whole but in capturing moral dilemmas within small moments of personal relations. The distances between

what people wish to say, what they can say, and what they dare not say supply a central impulse to his stories. Against a background of social change, these distances find expression now in humour, now in silence, compassion, or fear.

Conclusion

To classify Kathā-Prabhās exclusively as 'village stories' or 'middle-class satire' would diminish its literary individuality. The object-centred images and interpersonal practices of the seventh decade; the difficult questions of family, memory, and community in the eighth; and the self-narration, institutional pressures, and public crises of the ninth are not isolated dimensions. They are layers of experience within one changing society. The collection's principal achievements are its transformation of living conversational Maithili into a reflective narrative medium, its sharp recognition of contradictions in familiar life, and its sustained questioning of society's moral self-image.

Its limitations—at times excessive explanation, at others an uneven gendered or social perspective—are integral to a critical assessment. They do not render the work unimportant. Rather, they allow readers to understand how modern Maithili fiction absorbs the pressures of its time, sometimes resists them, and sometimes internalises their assumptions. Because of this tension, Kathā-Prabhās is not a book exhausted by one reading, but an important literary work that invites rereading.

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PART 14

BHARAT 2027: A Literary and Narratological Critique

1. Method of Study and Principles of Criticism

1.1 Treating the Text as Evidence

The first rule of this study is to distinguish between events represented in the book and claims made about the book. The novel itself repeatedly insists that 'what was heard', 'what was seen', and 'what is not known' are three distinct states. Accordingly, the critic must not turn a suspicion described on a particular page into a proven crime, or a character's statement in self-defence into established innocence. The social significance of an event is not identical to its judicial outcome. Four questions therefore guide the examination of each chapter: what is the narrative event; how is it formally constructed; which inequality in society does it reveal; and how successful is the scene as literature?

The five volumes of the primary text move successively towards the first experience of the courts, the right to information and appeals, the digital economy, citizenship and new laws, and a consolidated reckoning with twenty-seven years. Both the sequence of chapter titles and the events within them have served as the basis for verification. Several lawsuits intersect in the story; consequently, the conclusion of one case does not mean the conclusion of the entire narrative.

1.2 Three Foundations of Narratology

Gérard Genette's concepts of narrative time, order, duration, and focalisation provide a way of reading the book's journey from 2000 to 2027 [S12]. Paul Ricoeur's reflections on time and narrative are especially useful here: the years counted by history and the personal time experienced by a family waiting for justice do not move at the same rate [S13]. Mikhail Bakhtin's account of the polyphonic novel allows us to see how, within a single social dispute, police officers, victims, lawyers, teachers, labourers, journalists, and students speak in distinct and legitimate idioms [S14].

These theories are not labels mechanically imposed upon the text. For instance, the narrator frequently stays close to a character's consciousness, yet also resorts to external description when the scope of a legal issue needs clarification. Limited focalisation is thus combined with apparently omniscient commentary. Any analysis of that combination would remain incomplete unless it demonstrated the actual events, characters, and explicit sentences on which its conclusions rest.

1.3 Epistemic Justice and Testimony

Miranda Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice is a useful comparative tool for this novel: when a person's statement is regarded as less credible because of class, gender, region, language, or social prejudice, the search for truth becomes unequal [S15]. It prompts us to ask on what occasions Naseema, Madhavi, Nirmala, Sunita, Saira, Sudha, Manju, or Tarabai must translate their experiences into the language of evidence. Yet listening to a character's suffering and treating it as automatically proven in court are not the same act. The novel's ethical concern is to uphold both responsibilities together.

The critical purpose is not to turn the work into a book of legal illustrations. A damp ledger page, a piece of bread left on a plate, the shaking wall of a well, papers lost to the sea, a student unable to pay an examination fee: these literary scenes generate an experience wider than legal argument alone.

2. Structure, Time, and the Narrator of the Novel

2.1 Not One Centre but a Network of Centres

The opening episode in Darbhanga establishes the novel's principal tone, but the subsequent narrative does not merely unfold in its shadow. Ramdev Mandal's land in Jodhpur, Sudha's register of boats in the Andamans, a workers' register in Ludhiana, Saira's destroyed records in Ahmedabad, Manasvi's educational identity, Raghav's expenditure on games, a student's digital statement, and Arjun's withheld scholarship: each episode has its own independent human stakes. Revati Jha connects the threads, but not all events are driven by her will or heroism.

The unifying principle is not the courtroom or crime but 'the right to determine meaning'. A name is written in a ledger, but who will decide what that entry means? A photograph has circulated, but who will read the original statement? A bank account has been blocked, but what exact amount is affected? In their different forms, such questions make the novel a kind of social poetry of records. The form is exceptionally expansive; it is therefore read more successfully as a recurring ethical inquiry than as a linear solution to the mystery posed at the beginning.

2.2 Public Time and Private Time

The dates in the chapter headings connect the narrative with familiar national history: the attack on Parliament, violence in Gujarat, the maritime disaster, the right to information, global economic changes, popular movements, controversies over gaming, space missions, demonetisation, the privacy judgment, the pandemic, the farmers' movement, the new criminal codes, and legislation concerning online games played for money. But the story has a clock of its own, different from proclamations of epoch-making change. For a person

in distress, life may be governed not by the date of a major public event but by the next court hearing, four months away.

Between Amresh as a child in 2000 and Arjun as a student in 2027, the narrative's social imagery changes from entries in a paper ledger to lists on a screen. Yet names, sources, rights, and procedures construct a continuous ethical grammar across these periods. History here is not a straight line of progress; human vulnerability remains an abiding question even amid technological change.

2.3 The Courthouse Veranda at the Beginning and the End

The first chapter opens in a courthouse veranda with rain, wet papers, a family's food, and the gaze of the accused. The final chapter returns to the veranda of a district court, now bearing Revati's experience accumulated over many years, the ageing Shivnarayan's memories, and a young man's question about correcting a record. The repeated setting gives the work a circular shape. What began as a child's question, 'Is Father a thief?', has become the civic competence expressed in the advice: 'Ask for a written decision, examine its reasons, and choose the appropriate forum.'

Significantly, the final scene is not a triumphal celebration of omniscient justice. The financial examination before the special court is continuing; not everyone's loss has been repaired; and verification of records remains unfinished. The narrative is not weakened by this open ending; rather, it remains faithful to its declared principle. Nevertheless, readers of such a long novel may desire a more decisive and comprehensive resolution. That possible dissatisfaction, too, is a legitimate subject of criticism.

3. A Comprehensive Reading of the Five Volumes

3.1 Volume One — The First Door of the Court (Chapters 1–8)

This volume establishes the problem of interpreting the ledger seized from Nilkant Sah's house, discrepancies in the seizure list, uncertainty surrounding identification, and advocate Shivnarayan's professional scruples. The fear and national mourning after the attack on Parliament, a land dispute in Rajasthan, witnesses to the violence of 2002, the oceanic catastrophe in the Andamans, and the first judgment in 2004 broaden its ethical scope. The initial contradiction is that Nilkant is a helpful businessman within his community, yet some grounds for legal allegations against him also exist. His generosity does not automatically establish innocence, just as a name on paper is not complete proof of a crime.

The combined outcome of Chapter 8—conviction on a limited count and acquittal of other charges—has particular artistic significance. Popular narratives often invite the expectation that a person accepted as a hero will be declared entirely innocent. This work refuses that convenience. The thought that 'a clear answer need not be a short answer' signals both the aesthetic form and the ethical craftsmanship of this volume.

3.2 Volume Two — Records, Rights, and the High Court (Chapters 9–16)

In the era of the Right to Information, reading rooms, village offices, the new framework for combating money laundering, wages, popular movements, women witnesses, and land appeals enter the narrative together. A right is not merely a declaration here: it consists of acknowledgements of receipt, deadlines, registers, authentic copies, and the institution's obligation to respond. The meaning of money and land is inseparable from social relationships in these episodes. A well is not merely property; a worker's attendance register is surviving—or obliterated—testimony to the labour performed by a human body.

Revati's development from student to independent courtroom advocate constitutes an important long-term character arc. This volume's artistic achievement is to turn seemingly minor procedural events into scenes of individual rights. Its limitation is that some legal conversations expand to the dimensions of a student's textbook; between them, delicate domestic scenes restore the reader's emotional rhythm.

3.3 Volume Three — Digital Money and a Changing Country (Chapters 17–24)

As transactions associated with games, corrections of identity, edited social-media messages, queues at banks after demonetisation, privacy, dignity, Chandrayaan, and pandemic restrictions enter the narrative, the distance between what appears on a screen and the original record grows. Earlier, a single ledger page could be altered; now words on a screen can be cut out of context and circulated among thousands of people. Digitalisation facilitates clarification, but it also accelerates deception.

The Chandrayaan episodes celebrate the enlargement of knowledge while recognising that scientific measurement and legal evidence operate through different methods. The distinction teaches readers that the triumph of science does not itself resolve shortages of hospital beds, university fees, or workers' wages. During the pandemic years, the gulf between written regulations and actual access to treatment deepens the novel's social intelligence.

3.4 Volume Four — The State, Citizens, and New Laws (Chapters 25–32)

Respiratory crisis, the farmers' movement, bail in financial crime, Chandrayaan-3, transparency in electoral finance, examination disputes, the new criminal codes of 2024, and a locked university room: this volume compares the public promises of the state with the everyday capacities of ordinary citizens. A farmer's land right is not the same as the claim of a woman who labours in the field, but both raise questions about the right to be heard. In the examination

crisis of 2024, verifying an allegation and protecting an individual's hard work are two distinct standards.

It is particularly important that the work does not offer a one-sided denunciation of modern technology or changes in the law. It resists the simplistic misconception that the enactment of new codes automatically rewrites the facts of earlier incidents. A continuing reconciliation of people's conduct, institutional responsibility, and legal safeguards supplies the volume's ethical impetus.

3.5 Volume Five — Reckoning with Twenty-Seven Years (Chapters 33–40)

The final eight chapters encompass the 2025 legislation concerning online games played for money, an unverified register of five hundred names, frozen bank accounts, questions before a special court, limited relief granted by a high court, the circulation of falsehoods, clarification by the Supreme Court, and the district courthouse veranda. The literary purpose of the much-discussed aggregate figure of ₹2,000 crore is not to make it automatically stand as a proven criminal amount. The narrative repeatedly insists upon recalculation, double counting, identification of actual beneficiaries, specific banking trails, and the sources of funds.

Arjun's scholarship, money for Shanti's medicines, Mukul's fees, Tarun's bail, and the merits of a possible criminal charge cannot all receive the same conclusion in the same court. The judicial events of 2027 are fictional. Maintaining this distinction is the volume's particular artistic strength: limited decisions about individual rights amid the clamour surrounding large public numbers. Advice given to a young man in the final chapter about identifying the appropriate office becomes a scene of ethical inheritance. Twenty-seven years of experience have become not an individual's heroic achievement but a transferable civic method.

4. A Sequential Literary Critique of the Forty Chapters

This section separately examines each chapter's narrative function, imagery, ideological tension, and artistic evaluation. The chapters follow the order of the original manuscript; the narrative events described are distinguished from the critic's independent interpretation of them.

Chapter 1 — The Magistrate's Chamber

Setting and Time: Darbhanga, July 2000

The rain-soaked court premises of Darbhanga, Nirmala's food container, and the gaze of twelve-year-old Amresh make the opening scene human-centred. A ledger, money, and playing cards are seized from Nilkant Sah's shop. Dinanath Prasad's admission that the counts on the pages of the seizure record do not agree

reveals the investigator's ethical complexity. Shivnarayan Jha distinguishes the question of whether custody is necessary from that of eventual conviction.

Revati's written categories—'seen directly', 'reported', and 'unknown'—are, in effect, the narratological seed of the chapter. The appearance of the deceased Ramkishun Mahto's name against a new date introduces a mystery, but the discrepancy is not immediately treated as evidence of fraud. The contrast between the bread of domestic life and the papers of the court prevents the writing from becoming lifeless legal exposition. One critical limitation is the substantial amount of procedural instruction already present in the first chapter; nevertheless, this is also justified by its role in establishing the work's enduring tone.

Chapter 2 — The Seizure List

Setting and Time: Darbhanga, July–October 2000

'The Seizure List' subjects the seizure in the opening chapter to closer scrutiny. The differing positions of Mathuranand Kapari, Rafiq Ansari, Nirmala, and the police separate an inventory of objects from the subsequent 'journey' of those objects. The difference between Rafiq's signature in Urdu and his name's spelling in official Hindi is part of the multilingual reality of identification: the written form of a name can change without the person changing.

Restraint in testimony is a distinctive artistic quality here. Even a well-wisher should not claim to have seen what they did not see; the police, too, should avoid adding unwarranted inferences. These demands constitute the work's ethical position. At the literary level, the description of ink on the forty-fifth page, lists, and objects stored in a box creates a slow investigative narrative rather than a conventional mystery story. The reader's curiosity is aroused, but its satisfaction is deliberately postponed.

Chapter 3 — The Shadow of Parliament

Setting and Time: Delhi and Darbhanga, December 2001

Against the public tragedy of the attack on Parliament on 13 December 2001, the educational world of Revati and Rais Mir changes. National mourning and concern for security are joined by the domestic suffering of Shahida and Nazia, connected with suspicion directed at Faizan. The chapter's distinctive ethic is the refusal to set the nation's pain against the fear experienced by its citizens.

Here the 'shadow of Parliament' is not allowed to engulf the entire story of an accused person. Resisting terrorism and examining evidence fairly are treated as separate, equally necessary responsibilities. Suspicion arising from Rais's regional accent, the politics of names, and friendships at the university give the scene an inner plurality of voices. By bringing a vast public event into the small print of a personal file, the narrative offers an aesthetics of restraint in place of media sensationalism.

Chapter 4 — Land in the Desert

Setting and Time: Jodhpur, January 2002; flashback to 2001

Ramdev Mandal's well in Jodhpur, a footpath, cadastral plot numbers, and a sale deed of 1978 create a concrete material setting for rights over land. The educational trust's building in the desert region and the farmer's claim to tenancy or access cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between 'education' and 'the farmer'. Kusum Mandal's two jars of soil open the possibility of scientific testing, but she herself acknowledges that soil in a laboratory does not establish title to the land.

As an image of a material object, the well is the chapter's centre: water, family, access, safety, and history are all present there. Readers find a sensory relationship between the dry desert landscape and the dryness of the administrative file. The critical achievement is not the condemnation of institutional education, but the examination of an educational institution's responsibility towards the land it occupies.

Chapter 5 — The One Whose House Burned

Setting and Time: Ahmedabad, February–December 2002; parallel events in the desert region and Delhi

Against the background of the communal violence in Ahmedabad in 2002, Salim Ansari's home and the memories of Saira and their neighbours deepen the narrative's ethical shock. Destroyed school certificates, uncertain identification of faces, and Premji's changing statement indicate that establishing the truth of the violence is essential, while determining the involvement of a particular individual in each accusation remains a separate duty.

Saira, who witnessed the fire, does not claim to identify every face responsible for starting it. This distinction embodies the difficult courage of testimony. The title 'The One Whose House Burned' makes a house not merely a building but a repository of trust, letters, names, and possible futures. The work does not diminish the suffering produced by communal violence through legal technicalities; nevertheless, by insisting on the discipline of evidence, it holds back a potentially overpowering emotional climax.

Chapter 6 — The Home of the Silent Witness

Setting and Time: Darbhanga and Jodhpur, January–December 2003

In 'The Home of the Silent Witness', the social stigma visited upon Nilkant's household and Saira's memory of violence open a wider question: why does a witness not speak? Fear, insecurity, a lack of words, social pressure, and incomplete memory are all possible causes. Silence does not have a single meaning. The changed behaviour of customers at Nirmala's shop becomes a scene of informal punishment within ordinary life.

Amresh's increasing responsibilities during adolescence create another kind of judicial time outside the formal courtroom. The work does not romanticise silence as truth; it recognises the need for investigation. This chapter's successful technique is to understand 'what was said' through an examination of 'how it was left unsaid'. The modest labour of court clerk Ramvilas also adds a fine-grained realism to institutional life.

Chapter 7 — The Catastrophe at Sea

Setting and Time: Little Andaman, December 2004–January 2005

The Indian Ocean catastrophe of December 2004 overturns the lives of Sudha, Shishir, Anish, and Mausami in Little Andaman. The images of the sea suddenly retreating, people running towards higher ground, and the loss of the register of boats are exceptionally vivid. Distinct from the disaster's physical impact is an administrative difficulty: the evidence that people's lives existed has also been swept away.

Sudha obtains a receipt bearing an official stamp for her application. The stamp does not bring her husband back, but it provides a civic basis for saying, 'We were here.' Between the right to documentation and the boundlessness of grief, the narrative produces deeply controlled pathos. The lifeless particulars of court administration are set against the sound of the sea. This chapter may be counted among the book's finest literary moments.

Chapter 8 — The First Judgment

Setting and Time: Darbhanga, December 2004; a parallel sequence of events

Four years later, in Nilkant's case, Judge Vimalakant Mishra examines distinct questions concerning documents and evidence separately. The entry containing the deceased Ramkishun's name is not considered sufficient to sustain a conviction on that allegation, but Nilkant is found guilty of another, limited offence; a lawful fine is also imposed. The novel forgoes the convenience of constructing an entirely innocent hero.

Amresh's remark that a clear answer does not necessarily mean a short answer is a self-acknowledgement of the novel's form. The mixed verdict teaches readers to ask questions: why should someone who has helped others be assumed incapable of a different wrongdoing? In this balance, the work earns moral credibility. The detailed structure of the judgment, however, somewhat slows the narrative's pace.

Chapter 9 — The First Right to Information

Setting and Time: Darbhanga and Kamalpur, 2005

In the context of the Right to Information in 2005, matters concerning villages, libraries, and individual registers give rise to a new language for demanding answers from institutions. Asking for a document becomes an expression of

human dignity, although receiving the document does not mean reaching the final truth. The acknowledgement of an application, the time allowed for a response, the validity of a copy, and the possibility of appeal become practical dimensions of rights within the story.

The chapter's special quality is that an ordinary woman or rural applicant acquires civic capacity not through a heroic speech but through a sequence of evidence. The 'first right' does not mean final and complete control; it means the opportunity to ask questions. At times, however, descriptions of information administration take on the character of a research report; the domestic episodes keep that procedural account connected with lived experience.

Chapter 10 — The New Law against Money Laundering

Setting and Time: Darbhanga, Kamalpur, and Mumbai, 2005–2006

With the introduction of the legal framework against money laundering, the language of banks, accounts, beneficiaries, and financial sources enters the narrative. A deceased person's name or an inconsistency in an attendance register may justify an inquiry, but its connection with financial crime is not thereby established. Rather than the names of statutory provisions, the characters' questions matter: from whom did the money come, who authorised it, and what service was actually provided?

Here the work experiments with relating technical legal terminology to citizens' experiences. The mystery of the opening ledger has now become a question about modern financial networks. Critically, this chapter prepares the ground for the later climax involving digital finance. Its immediate dramatic force may be limited, but its structural importance within the long narrative is considerable.

Chapter 11 — A Second Record of the Desert

Setting and Time: Jodhpur, 2006–2007

In the second record of the desert, Ramdev's land, the trust's map, original documents, measurements, and corrections to testimony come once again into focus. Earlier events keep the story moving, but the second copy of documents relating to an old dispute is not mere repetition: it makes the limitations of the first admission more apparent. Kusum and Naseema carry questions of justice arising within an educational institution.

The distance between a map of the land and the footpath people actually walk upon becomes a social symbol. The question of a copy versus an original is not merely a matter of archival science; it concerns the geographical right to live and move. The slow pace is a condition of the novel's broad patience, though the growing burden placed upon readers' memories is also a limitation of this technique.

Chapter 12 — Chandrayaan and the Accused

Setting and Time: 2008; Ludhiana, Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Darbhanga

The scientific mission of 2008, the violence in Mumbai, and the working world of Ludhiana share a single historical horizon. The celestial distance covered by Chandrayaan and the earthly distance separating workers from unpaid wages are not opposites but aspects of modern India's complex coexistence. One can celebrate the success of science and still raise questions about citizens' rights.

In particular, the lesson of avoiding a rush to convict after a security crisis tempers any linear celebration of modernity. The narrator holds to an important principle: a discourse of national pride must not silence the account of local suffering. The artistic challenge is that, when several newsworthy events are brought together in one chapter, the intimate development of some characters may be restricted.

Chapter 13 — The Workers' Unpaid Wages

Setting and Time: 2009–2010; Ludhiana

At a factory in Ludhiana, the days worked by Ramlakhan Paswan, Sunita, Baldev, Phulkumari, and other labourers are missing from the attendance register, placing the very existence of their labour in doubt. Counting women engaged in sorting work solely according to a contractor's account is an everyday form of exploitation. A needle wound is direct bodily memory, but to become legal evidence it must be accompanied by slips, fellow workers' accounts, and a history of payment.

The principle 'Those whose names are recorded must have a voice' expresses the chapter's democratic core. The scene of partial settlement of outstanding payments is credible precisely because of its limits: a single order does not liberate every worker. The ethic of evidence Sunita learns here becomes a foundation for later struggles over bank accounts and relief.

Chapter 14 — The Platform of a People's Movement

Setting and Time: 2010–2011; Delhi, Sonpura, and Ludhiana

Alongside the public platform of a people's movement, the chairs, fan, and grant accounts of Sonpura's reading room construct an alternative political geography. Against grand anti-corruption declarations, a small town's account book and shortage of books emerge as more tangible questions. The roles of Urmila Vats, Sharda, Arpana, and Bindu, a schoolgirl, demonstrate civic responsibility extending beyond formal institutional control.

This chapter distances itself both from romantic hero-worship of movements and from wholesale distrust. The democratic energy of public declarations matters, but allegations made without specific bills and proof of receipt can become disorderly. Bindu's essay, 'The Future of My Town', offers a simple but effective image of responsibility across generations.

Chapter 15 — A Woman Becomes a Witness

Setting and Time: 2012; Delhi, Darbhanga, and Ludhiana

Madhavi's testimony places at the centre the relationship between a woman's body, memory, fear, and the questions asked by a court. Revati assists the complainant but opposes the rehearsing of answers. The possible witness Poonam should be heard independently rather than treated as someone bound to corroborate a predetermined version.

For 'a woman becomes a witness' means more than entering a courtroom: it also means identifying the limits of one's own memory. The work does not represent a complainant's uncertainty or discrepancies in recollection as moral defects, although it does not exempt testimony from judicial scrutiny. Restraint in language protects dignity; critically, however, there remains a possibility that legal caution partly muffles the character's inward suffering.

Chapter 16 — A Question before the High Court

Setting and Time: Jodhpur and the Rajasthan High Court, December 2012–January 2013

Before the Rajasthan High Court, Ramdev's land, the use of a footpath, and rights relating to drainage emerge as distinct questions. The earlier court's approach to ownership is reconsidered in light of whether it adequately heard the specific practical rights at issue. Revati is no longer a pupil; she has become an advocate reading the records on her own behalf.

The particular achievement is that, as the court studies the map of the land, the daily movements of human beings become visible once more. 'Giving an answer' is different from 'providing a fair opportunity to address a specific issue': this subtle distinction is the chapter's intellectual centre. The limited outcome of the appeal is not a dramatic triumph, but it marks a concrete point in the protagonist's development.

Chapter 17 — The Bargain within the Game

Setting and Time: Delhi, Darbhanga, and Ludhiana; May–November 2013

Against the background of betting in sport and financial irregularities in 2013, the social worlds of Raghav, Arunima, Amresh, and Revati intersect. By setting the episode of a local competition apart from much-discussed events at the national level, the author makes a deliberate narrative choice: the text does not heighten its appeal by inventing an unsupported connection. The role of the student keeping the scores, the authority to approve expenditure, and the decision concerning actual payment are examined separately.

Having learned from the mistakes of Nilkant's earlier life, Amresh does not condemn sport itself; instead, he examines the relationship between deception and wagering. The distinctions among skill, chance, fraud, and unlawful gain become a new version of the book's early legal argument. Rather than dwelling on the player's popular image, the narrative traces the movement of financial documents. This analytical emphasis, however, somewhat restrains the excitement of the story.

Chapter 18 — The Road to Mars and the Right to Identity

Setting and Time: 2014; Jodhpur, Bengaluru, Delhi, and Darbhanga

Alongside the scientific horizon opened by the Mangalyaan mission in 2014 runs Mansvi's struggle to have her correct identity recorded on her educational certificate. Mansvi does not demand that her school history be erased; she seeks an accurate name on her present certificate and a transparent relationship between it and the original copy. Binesari's maternal affection and Saira's experience of a destroyed certificate provide a human bridge between the two cases.

'The road to Mars' and 'the right to identity' together reveal two directions of a progressive nation: the capacity to reach another planet and the ability to secure proper recognition of one's own name. The work succeeds in making scientific achievement a metaphor for human rights. Yet the connection between a technological mission and an administrative dispute is primarily conceptual, not causal. Recognising that distinction allows the formal achievement to be appreciated more precisely.

Chapter 19 — A Sentence Written on the Screen

Setting and Time: 2015; Jodhpur, Jaipur, Delhi, and Darbhanga

Amid the 2015 dispute over hostel water, library expenditure, and objections to repairs, an extract from an original statement written by Vivek Meghwal acquires a different meaning in digital circulation. Shashank makes an allegation without first consulting the original, but later accepts a correction. Kanak's reduction of an image and the authorship of an anonymous threat are two distinct matters of fact.

The modern 'witness' has become the screenshot, yet its sequence, provenance, edited form, and authorship must be examined separately. The chapter does not declare indignation on social media illegitimate; it recognises students' right to ask questions. The image of a sentence cut from its context is readily intelligible and effective, although the repeatedly stated lesson about primary sources at times overwhelms the spontaneous conflict among characters.

Chapter 20 — The Last Night of Cash

Setting and Time: 2016; Ludhiana, Chandigarh, Darbhanga, and Jodhpur

In the bank queues formed during the demonetisation of 2016, time carries different costs for elderly people, hospital patients, labourers, and small account-holders. The perspectives of Sarabjit Kaur, a bank employee, and Sunita, who assists workers, together reveal the gap between a rule and access to money needed for living. Even a single letter in the name entered in a bank passbook may delay food or medicine.

The work does not pronounce an all-embracing verdict on economic policy; it portrays the everyday effects of institutional difficulty. The title 'The Last Night of Cash' connects a great national event to an extinguished household hearth. What might appear to be a repeated dispute about entries in a register assumes fresh meaning here as the pain of digital transition.

Chapter 21 — In the Name of Privacy

Setting and Time: 2017; Jodhpur, Ludhiana, Chandigarh, Delhi, and Darbhanga

At the moment when privacy received constitutional recognition in 2017, the narrative addresses the balance between public use of personal information and a court's legitimate need for relevant material. A person's identity, educational records, or digital accounts cannot be made entirely invisible to lawful state examination; nevertheless, relinquishing all confidentiality is not a condition of citizenship.

The 'name' in this chapter is bound to an individual's right of self-determination. The work draws privacy down from an abstract proposition into applications made at schools, banks, and offices. Argumentative exchanges sometimes imitate the language of a court delivering a definitive ruling; the formal strength of the chapter lies in giving this complex principle a recognisable shape within numerous lives.

Chapter 22 — The Many Meanings of Dignity

Setting and Time: 2018; Jodhpur, Darbhanga, Delhi, Ludhiana, and Chandigarh

In 2018, the question of social dignity expands through the experiences of several characters. Dignity is not merely the reputation lost when someone is accused; it is also the right to speak for oneself concerning one's body, identity,

relationships, and work. This principle recurs through Mansvi's earlier questions, Madhavi's testimony, and the voices of women workers.

Rather than deliver a moral sermon, the chapter attempts to become a debate among the many 'meanings' of dignity. A legal record identifies a person but does not capture an entire personality. The critical question is whether the numerous characters who share this principle ultimately move towards much the same reasoned conclusion. More persistent voices of disagreement might have enlarged the narrative's polyphony.

Chapter 23 — Darkness on the Moon, Questions in the Valley

Setting and Time: 2019; Sriharikota, Jodhpur, Srinagar, Delhi, and Darbhanga

The juxtaposition of Chandrayaan-2's attempted landing in 2019 and the political and administrative questions concerning Kashmir underscores the layered nature of national feeling. The chapter's ethical direction is twofold: an incomplete scientific attempt must not be dismissed as no achievement at all, and the scale of political news must not overwhelm questions of evidence affecting individuals in local settings.

Both the 'darkness' of the sky and the 'questions' of the valley suggest uncertainty beyond what can immediately be seen. The work favours withholding conclusions where the evidence does not warrant them. Its arguments are conceptually coherent, yet the assembly of large national developments in one chapter can sometimes make the fiction resemble a chronicle of the year's news. The discernment exercised by domestic characters sustains its character as a novel.

Chapter 24 — Closed Courts, Open Suffering

Setting and Time: 2020; Ludhiana, Jodhpur, Delhi, Darbhanga, Chandigarh, and the Andaman Islands

During the pandemic of 2020, medical, economic, and social suffering remained fully exposed outside court premises that were closed or operating under restrictions. The different circumstances of Ludhiana, Jodhpur, Delhi, Darbhanga, and the Andaman Islands reveal the unequal effects of a single pandemic. The distance between an order available on paper and an actual hospital bed or an internet connection deepens citizens' insecurity.

The opposition between 'closed' and 'open' in the title is an effective inversion. The chapter does not take the easy course of claiming that judicial processes stopped altogether; instead, it questions both institutions' changing means of functioning and people's ability to reach them. Amid the distress of a public-health emergency, the analytical voice provides ethical discipline, although some scenes would benefit from a more emotionally concentrated development.

Chapter 25 — The Price of Breath

Setting and Time: Ludhiana, Darbhanga, Jodhpur, and Delhi; 2021

In the respiratory crisis of 2021, oxygen, hospital capacity, medical labour, and families' anguish become a tangible geography of social justice. The professional responsibility of a doctor or medical assistant is measured not only by the verification of figures but also by the provision of treatment in time. State regulations and inventories of supplies are placed beside the needs of the patient's body.

The title 'The Price of Breath' has several meanings: a market price, an administrative priority, a scientific measurement, and the immeasurable value of remaining alive. This chapter opens the novel beyond a purely courtroom narrative into the ethics of health care. The concern is that the human tragedy of inadequate treatment may, in places, be absorbed too thoroughly into the lucid order of a case file.

Chapter 26 — A Voice Raised in the Name of the Fields

Setting and Time: 2021; Harnampur, Ludhiana, Chandigarh, and the farmers' protests on the borders of Delhi

During the farmers' movement, the interests of landowners, agricultural labourers, citizens, and travellers seeking to reach hospitals differ among Jaspreet, Gurnam, Manju, and the other characters of Harnampur. The right to protest and the public use of roads can come into conflict without either extinguishing the other. Manju works in the fields, yet the documents of ownership do not bear her name; this disparity exposes the gender politics of land in society.

The chapter's central literary question is whose voices are included when demands are raised publicly in the name of the fields. The young girl Ragini's drawing, the new green leaves of wheat, and descriptions of agricultural labour offer relief from the severity of the arguments. The narrative trusts the reality of competing local interests more than the construction of heroic figures out of a movement.

Chapter 27 — The Test of Crime and Bail

Setting and Time: Delhi, Darbhanga, and Chandigarh; 2022

In an allegation of financial wrongdoing in 2022, a family's fear, an accused person's bail, the victim's loss, and the protection of public money are separate issues. The situations of Kabir Sareen, Pramod, Nihal, Yashoda, Faizan, and Revati make clear that the refusal of bail does not establish guilt; equally, the seriousness of an allegation does not erase a victim's loss.

Through the perspective of the journalist Noor, the chapter demonstrates two forms of caution: not describing an accused person as a 'convicted criminal', and not dismissing the victim's experience as insignificant. Understanding the

limited meaning of a court's order is the principal subject here. The reader gains an understanding of procedural distinctions, though characters often express legal differences with such exceptional clarity that the natural uncertainties of conversation are sometimes diminished.

Chapter 28 — The Light of Chandrayaan

Setting and Time: Bengaluru, Jodhpur, and Darbhanga; 2023

Against the successful Chandrayaan-3 mission of 2023, the rural science workshops involving Avani, Maitreyi, Kusum, Tarabai, and Chandana create a new narrative of scientific culture. Measuring temperature repeatedly during an experiment and observing small variations in the results become a scene of knowledge tested through repetition. Questions about the accounting of a public grant do not automatically establish scientific work as fraudulent, but transparency in the use of the grant remains essential.

Maitreyi's experience of preparing a science booklet in Maithili is a particularly significant literary achievement. The language in which knowledge is expressed determines who can gain social access to it; on this question, the work also examines the medium of its own writing. The balance between scientific curiosity and financial accountability is especially visible here.

Chapter 29 — The Record of Electoral Money

Setting and Time: 2024; Jodhpur, Delhi, Ludhiana, and Darbhanga

Public records of electoral financing in 2024 open an immense field of questions for Riddhi, Noor, Firdaus, and Vivek. The appearance of a contribution in a public list does not, by itself, establish an improper benefit, a contract, or a crime. Preserving an earlier version of the list, explaining the method of calculation, and distinguishing a cropped image from an original copy provide examples of responsible journalism.

The arrival of the Maithili writer Anupama Jha brings alive a self-reflective distinction between the methods of 'literature' and 'news'. She reminds readers that the imaginative freedom of literature and the factual responsibility of a journalist are not the same. Such self-awareness gives the novel an opportunity to examine the conditions of its own genre. Resistance to inserting the name of a suspect 'H. Chauhan' without sufficient confirmation remains part of the story's discipline of evidence.

Chapter 30 — Who Stole the Examination Questions?

Setting and Time: Jodhpur, Bengaluru, and Delhi; 2024

Against the background of an examination controversy in 2024, the sustained studies of Geeta and Tarabai, their unequal resources, and the emotional weight of examination results move to the centre. The national controversy over leaked question papers is kept distinct from a local coaching institution's dispute over

repayment of fees. The promotion of 'guaranteed questions', the classes actually delivered, and the beneficiary of a bank payment focus the work on the financial exploitation of students' aspirations.

Tarabai's claim for forty-eight thousand rupees and Geeta's decision to read her answer sheet again have different narrative values. Failure or a low mark is not the end of self-respect. The novel resists making a single examination the measure of an entire life. The chapter's emotionally charged final scene restores an appropriate measure of humanity to the judicial analysis.

Chapter 31 — New Codes, Old Allegations

Setting and Time: Delhi, Jodhpur, and Ludhiana; July–December 2024

As the new criminal codes came into force in July 2024, the relationship between the date of an earlier alleged offence and the rules governing present procedures becomes a challenging narrative experiment. Revati records the date on which an incident began in her file, explaining to the others that changing the name of a law does not give a past offence or the evidence concerning it a new birth. The demand for a suspicious digital payment from Parvati in the name of 'verification' is a poignant instance of new forms of exploitation.

By bringing together unfamiliarity with the old judicial corridors and fear of the new mobile phone, the work reveals the limits of reform. In formal terms, the subtle handling of legal transition is admirable; nevertheless, keeping a precise balance between exposition of the law and narration is difficult. The density of technical terminology in this chapter exceeds that in many others.

Chapter 32 — The University's Closed Room

Setting and Time: Jodhpur and Kota; parallel events in 2024

The closed university counselling room, opaque admission procedures, the psychological pressure upon the students Payal and Himmat, and Riddhi's attempt to obtain records expose a moral crisis within educational institutions. Students who stake their futures upon education are surrounded by unequal forms of power; the pressure to treat one dream as the sole value of life is intense.

The 'closed room' is not merely a locked door but an image of administrative silence. The author does not believe that the despondency of a distressed student can be dispelled by easy reassurance. The chapter also matters because the new crisis of a register containing five hundred names emerges from this setting: confidential information shared in individual counselling may become a public source of fear when unauthorised circulation is possible.

Chapter 33 — The New Law on Gambling

Setting and Time: 2025; Darbhanga, Jodhpur, and Delhi

In the legal setting of online games involving money in 2025, Nilkant's family once again confronts the problem of a ledger, but the mobile game 'Ranglahar'

now occupies the place once held by a room in a shop. Ramautar's son Amit becomes trapped in the temptation to recover money repeatedly lost; the deprivation experienced in the households of Chanda and Bindiya reveals the social cost. Amresh makes clear that all mobile games are not the same kind of wagering.

The work connects legal prohibition to questions of individual responsibility, misleading digital inducements, and respect for affected families. Drawing on his earlier experience, Nilkant offers a new ledger with the headings 'Liability, Payment, Refund, Dispute'—a recurring object that reconnects the narrative with its beginning. Yet the text does not presume to settle the ultimate judicial interpretation of constitutional disputes over changing legislation, a restraint the criticism must also observe.

Chapter 34 — The Ledger of Five Hundred Names

Setting and Time: Jodhpur, Ludhiana, Kharar, and Mohali; December 2025–March 2026

A list containing five hundred names is discovered on the campus of Marudhar University. Kusum safeguards the envelope, while Riddhi, Uma, and Inspector Seema attempt to trace the document to its original source. The list contains old cancelled applications, variations in spelling, repeated entries, and evidence of possible flows of data. 'Five hundred names' does not mean five hundred guilty people: this distinction is the foundation of the chapter.

The scene in which an unverified list is prevented from being pinned to the hostel notice board is not an ethic of silence but an example of responsible dissemination. Shailesh's experience of legitimate employment provides a difficult counter-testimony against declaring an entire programme fraudulent without investigation. Despite its extensive network of characters, the narrative retains the paper envelope as its centre.

Chapter 35 — The Account Is Frozen

Setting and Time: Jodhpur, Ludhiana, Kharar, and Darbhanga; April–September 2026

From April to September 2026, restrictions on bank accounts push the ordinary citizen's bodily and everyday life into immediate crisis. Arjun's fees, Shanti Devi's medicines, Champa's food, and Mukul's disputed money may look alike at first, but the legal ground for each restriction, its extent, and its beneficiary differ. A bank employee's sentence—'The screen does not record a verdict of criminal guilt'—captures the chapter's original insight.

The insistence upon understanding the proportion between the amount frozen and the actual needs of an investigation turns the work into a humane narrative of modern financial procedure. A small scene of sharing bread establishes mutual assistance among citizens as a value outside the courts. The story offers no sweeping announcement of liberation from bank restrictions; its fidelity lies in acknowledging the limits of specific relief.

Chapter 36 — The Special Court's Hard Questions

Setting and Time: Jodhpur, Mumbai, Darbhanga, and Dubai; September–October 2026

Before the special court, the much-publicised aggregate figure of ₹2,000 crore, five hundred entries, and three banking chains are separate objects of inquiry. Through Anuradha Sen, Neerja Rathore, Sandhya Pareek, Arjun, and other parties, the chapter shows that a consolidated estimate, a verified payment, and a proved offence do not carry the same evidentiary value. Bail, refunds of fees, money needed for medicines, and the merits of prosecution belong to separate processes.

The severity of these 'hard questions' does not consist in declaring someone guilty at once; it lies in the courage to count the figures again and inspect their sources. As a critical image, the contrast between an enormous sum and the refusal to recount a single coin belonging to an ordinary street vendor is effective. Nevertheless, the density of financial and technical detail makes the flow of the narrative demanding for some readers.

Chapter 37 — Twenty-Seven Years in the High Court

Setting and Time: Jodhpur and Darbhanga; October–December 2026

Against the background of the High Court, questions about the particular restriction imposed upon Arjun's account, protection of private information, and future legitimate payments are examined at length. Revati and Shalini abandon the inappropriate prayer to 'declare him innocent' and seek relief properly limited to the issue before the court. The twenty-seven years invoked by the title connect Revati's private time as a professional to the public patience of the judicial system.

Shivnarayan's memory of an old bus ticket is not equated with a copy of a new judicial order; in this subtle suggestion, the novel itself acknowledges the distinct limits of personal memory and institutional records. This chapter may be called a mature presentation of the work's governing inner principle, although its immediate sense of dramatic resolution remains relatively weak.

Chapter 38 — The Cost of Falsehood

Setting and Time: Jodhpur, Ludhiana, Darbhanga, Mumbai, and Dubai; November–December 2026

In an early internal table, nineteen entries bearing the classification 'C/ADJ' are transformed, in a cropped digital image, into a claim of '95 per cent cash withdrawals'. A ratio calculated from twenty selected rows spreads as purported evidence of an entire financial network. Anuradha separates the actual movement of ₹12.40 lakh, possible double-counting, and a distinct promotional payment of ₹6.25 lakh according to their respective sources.

'The Cost of Falsehood' captures not only the ethical harm of rumour but also the risk that investigation of genuinely suspicious entries may become obscured.

The modest image of Rani's bridge makes visible a desire for justice to reach the homes of real victims. The chapter gives the reader more than the victory of having 'corrected a wrong figure'; it also reveals how difficult it is to assign the proper meaning to an accurate figure.

Chapter 39 — Before the Supreme Court

Setting and Time: Delhi, Jodhpur, Darbhanga, Ludhiana, Mumbai, and the Andaman Islands; January–February 2027

In the fictional Supreme Court proceedings of January–February 2027, the issue is the limited meaning of the High Court's interim order concerning bank accounts. The interests of the state, banks, and individual account-holders are not identical; the narrative carefully constructs the sequence of special leave, hearing, and limited clarification. A large allegation in the newspapers does not, by its own force, enlarge the questions before a court.

The small happiness of Arjun's ability to resume his studies supplies a human measure of judicial consequences. Rather than formulate a universal one-line prohibition, the bank employee Sarabjit insists on checking the authority for the order, its grounds, and compliance within the banking system. In formal terms, it is notable that proportional administrative relief, rather than the grandeur of the highest court, becomes the centre. To mistake these scenes for actual judgments delivered in 2027 would be a misreading of the text.

Chapter 40 — The District Court Veranda

Setting and Time: Darbhanga, Jodhpur, Ludhiana, Bengaluru, and the Andaman Islands; March–April 2027

The district court veranda of March–April 2027 echoes the veranda of the year 2000. A young man seeking correction of his mother's revenue record arrives at the wrong judicial forum; Revati teaches him to identify the competent authority, obtain a written decision, and establish the route of appeal. Elsewhere, the financial inquiry before the special court continues, while Anupama decides against inserting fresh news into an earlier work in a way that would distort its original historical time.

The novel ends not with a proclamation that the whole nation has become just, but with the practical autonomy of a citizen. The recollection of a deceased name in the opening ledger returns to the elderly Shivnarayan, yet the young man of the present wants the correct name of his living mother. This reversal gives the work a profound structural completion. A limitation remains: after so vast an epic span of time, some readers may wish for a more definite individual resolution. Nevertheless, the open ending accords with the narrative's declared ethic of evidence.

5. Characters, Gender, and Social Experience

5.1 Revatī Jhā: From Learning to Responsibility

Revatī Jhā is the character whose presence is sustained most consistently throughout the novel; yet to call her an omnipotent saviour would diminish the independence of its other characters. At the outset, she reads law books in her father's office, learning the discipline of "direct evidence, statement, unknown," the limits governing questions about custody, the reliability of testimony concerning seizure, and the meaning of a restricted judicial order. In the intervening years, distinguishing among the separate forums for land appeals, women witnesses, financial documents, and administrative authority becomes part of her independent professional practice. In the final volume, she herself cuts down and refines the scope of an application so that it may properly undergo judicial review. Her development is less a journey of outward courage than one of inward intellectual integrity.

What makes Revatī critically interesting is that, even while learning from her father, she questions him. Why is the law so expensive and difficult for the poor? Śivanārāyaṇ cannot initially give a complete answer. Revatī's character seems to keep that unanswered question alive before the reader. Judicial discernment does not struggle against her human sympathy; rather, it prevents sympathy from becoming precipitate judgment. A possible limitation of so long-standing a character, however, is that Revatī discovers remarkably appropriate language in many conflicts. Had the novel shown larger, more sustained consequences of her own mistaken assumptions, her human vulnerability might have emerged more fully.

5.2 Śivanārāyaṇ, Dīnānāth, and Vimalākānt: Conscience within Institutions

Śivanārāyaṇ's statements are not simply legal sermons; they belong to a professional discipline of keeping factual claims within their limits. He listens to a client's suffering but does not invent truth, nor does he treat a person's general social goodness as an automatic rebuttal to a specific criminal allegation. Although Dīnānāth represents the police, he is no one-dimensional villain. He records defects in seizure, acknowledges uncertainty in an investigation, and takes seriously the possibility of a genuine offence. Judge Vimalākānt's questions distinguish accusation, custody, testimony, punishment, and the limits of adjudication. Within this triangle, the judicial institution is not godlike: it is an institution made of human responsibility and procedures capable of correction.

In many social novels an official becomes either an outright villain or an omniscient arbiter. Here the institution contains disagreements, errors, and honest labour. That is an important achievement from the standpoint of social realism. Nevertheless, some harsher structural forms of institutional violence

may appear softened by these morally restrained official voices. Criticism must ask how far individual probity can alter institutional inequality.

5.3 Nirmalā, Sudhā, Sāyrā, and Mādhavī: Incomplete Records of Suffering

In Nīlakānt's case, Nirmalā is not merely a wife waiting at home: she runs a shop, checks facts against a copy that survived destruction, and states clearly what she did and did not see on the night of the seizure. Sudhā loses the records of her household and family in the sea's devastation, yet practises re-inscribing her civic existence through a government receipt stamp. Sāyrā witnesses her house burning but refrains from claiming to know the faces of everyone responsible for setting it alight. Mādhavī experiences the difficulty of finding her voice in court and refuses to let a written supposition override her memory.

What these women share is not an easy ideal of womanhood; each undertakes the difficult labour of recognising the limits of her own experience. Patriarchal circumstances appear now as a problem of name, now as loss of home, and now as fear of giving testimony. The author's distinctive achievement is to grant women's voices epistemic as well as emotional standing. Yet many of the women ultimately move towards a broadly similar moral agreement about the careful handling of evidence. More sustained critical disagreement within that shared position would also have been possible.

5.4 Sunītā, Jasprīt, Kusum, Maitreyī, Riddhi, and Nūr: The New Woman in Public Life

Sunītā Pāswān moves from understanding the meaning of limited relief written in the margin of a wage slip to helping with a suspiciously frozen bank account. Jasprīt keeps the interests of landowners and agricultural labourers distinct during the farmers' movement. Kusum connects land measurement, the student hostel, and scientific experimentation. Maitreyī experiments with making science education possible in Maithili. Riddhi preserves successive corrected versions of a data list; Nūr keeps journalistic practice at a distance from falsehood and sensational headlines.

The public participation of these women is not confined to a single field: it extends across law, agriculture, education, accounting, scientific method, and communication. The novel places its confidence not in proclamatory slogans of women's emancipation but in practical forms of responsibility. This makes its characters credible citizens. Yet one may also ask how far the darker depths of political anger, distrust, private jealousy, and failure are represented. Most episodes ultimately incline towards the consequences of self-restraint.

5.5 The Changing Roles of Children, Young People, and the Elderly

The movement from twelve-year-old Amreś's innocent questions to his later adult powers of discrimination; Gītā and Tārābāī's experiences of examinations; Pāyal and Himmat's university dilemmas; Arjun's scholarship; Rānī's drawing of a bridge; and the elderly Śivanārāyaṇ's torn bus ticket—all distribute questions of social justice across the different temporalities of generations. An elderly person's recollection, a young person's mobile phone, and a child's school account do not possess the same urgency within a given year.

Many characters learn, but they do not all learn the same lesson. Sudhā's Anīś learns that papers cannot bring his father back; Arjun learns that being able to continue an examination is itself a right. Education becomes literary at precisely the point where a maxim ceases to replace an irreparable loss in life and becomes instead a practice of responsibility.

6. Records, Memory, Numbers, and the Digital Age

6.1 Ledgers, Receipts, Copies, and Seals: The Metaphorical Lives of Objects

Paper is not alive in the novel, but it can become evidence of a living person's rights. The soaked ledger, seizure inventory, death register, map of a well, labourer's slip, boat register, copy of a certificate, bank payment declined, and judicial order all possess different evidentiary statuses. The narrator gives objects an almost character-like presence because their transfer alters social relationships. The appearance of a dead person's name on a ledger page is not simply information about a villain; it opens questions about the writer of the entry, its date, and the identity of the person named.

Original/copy, old/revised, witnessed/heard, complete/cropped: these paired distinctions construct the novel's semantic system. The distance between conventional acts of remembrance and legal documentation is evident in this metaphorical treatment of objects. The language of the ledger in Nīlakānt's household takes another medium in the bank freeze of 2026, but the question of authenticity remains.

6.2 The Aesthetics and Grammar of Repetition

Again and again the novel returns to principles such as "a written name alone does not establish guilt," "bail is not a verdict," "examine the original source," and "do not invent what you do not know." Taken as mere verbal repetition, the style can seem monotonous. Viewed across the historical development of the problem, however, the paper ledger of 2000, a witness to the violence of 2002, civic existence after the disaster of 2004, a digital image in 2015, and banking data in 2026 become different tests of the same intellectual principle.

Nevertheless, the quantity of repetition is not beyond criticism. In certain episodes a character answers a question in highly explicit explanatory sentences; differences of voice, occupation, and social class risk becoming blurred. If some conversations had remained unresolved and some characters had persisted in mistaken conclusions, the polyphonic tension could have increased. The strength and the limitation of repetition must both be acknowledged.

6.3 The Untruth of Data and the Myth of Aggregated Numbers

In the final volume, "five hundred names" and "two thousand crore" function as numerical motifs. A register of five hundred may contain duplicates and unrelated individuals; a table totalling two thousand crore may count the same money twice. Even a mathematically accurate number does not establish the accuracy of its social meaning. The portrayal of turning nineteen-twentieths of a classified sample into 95 per cent of an entire network offers a dramatic illustration of this error.

The work thus offers a modern democratic critique founded on fact-checking. A caution remains essential: the amounts of ₹12.40 lakh and ₹6.25 lakh, the broader allegations, and the imaginary chain of judicial proceedings described in the novel are not independent historical facts. They are examples internal to the fictional narrative. The critic's aim is to understand their artistic and methodological meaning, not to claim independent verification of sensational sums.

6.4 Privacy versus Public Accountability

Public access to records is a condition of democracy, but the private information of every student, patient, or account holder is not material for indiscriminate circulation. Nūr obtains consent before disclosing a victim's identity in an interview; Kusum does not post a suspect list on a public noticeboard; bank employees inquire into the precise limits of an order. The novel avoids the simplifying alternatives of "expose everything" and "conceal everything."

This balance deserves particular scrutiny because evidence of truth may at times conflict with confidentiality. The right to privacy is recognised within available legal tests, while the characters experience fear beyond those tests as well. The ethics of knowledge and personal dignity become mutually dependent in this section.

7. Language, Imagery, Dialogue, and Artistic Evaluation

7.1 The Material Energy of Language

Maithili is not ornamental scenery in the work; it is the natural medium of civic experience. Words such as duāri (doorway), barāmdā (veranda), pagariyā (footpath), kūp (well), kāpī (notebook), bahī (ledger), pāvatī (receipt), majdūrī (wages), sunabāī (hearing), and ghail (water vessel) mingle with the technical

world of law. The formal idiom of court and the daily speech of home have different rhythms. Nirmalā, for example, speaks of food, while Śivanārāyaṇ speaks of the specific necessity for custody; both disclose incomplete aspects of one person's life.

The reader also witnesses the possibility of discussing modern banking, scientific measurement, electoral money, and digital sources in Maithili. The episode in which Maitreyī teaches science in the mother tongue constitutes a defence of the novel's own linguistic practice. Nevertheless, some literally translated legal terminology stands apart from ordinary speech; the writer himself identifies that distance in several scenes. These two levels of language make the work valuable for research.

7.2 The Architecture of Scenes: Rain, Fire, Sea, Well, and Moon

The wet roof in the first chapter creates an atmosphere of legal insecurity; the burning house in 2002 images the physical destruction of records; the sea in 2004 becomes a force that strips people of the documents establishing their existence; the well of the arid land holds remembered water in a dry landscape; and the Chandrayaan sequence opens the sky of scientific possibility. The relationships among these five objects are symbolic, yet none of the scenes is severed from its material reality.

The drawing of a bridge at the end is especially significant. The passage of water beneath the bridge is part of Rānī's childhood imagination, but it also becomes a metaphor for innocent money obstructed by broad banking or judicial restrictions. This scene gives compact visual expression to arguments otherwise pursued on paper. When the author trusts such objects, his writing is at its most literary; when a scene immediately turns into an explanatory lesson, its poetic autonomy is diminished.

7.3 Reflection in Dialogue and the Risk of Didacticism

Much of the novel's dialogue develops through the sequence of legal question and answer. "Who saw it?", "When?", "Where is the original?", "Who has authority?"—such brief questions oblige readers to consider the basis of proof. The particular power of the dialogue lies in its determination of limits. Advocates, judges, teachers, journalists, and bank employees choose different words according to the demands of their actual responsibilities.

At times, however, dialogue appears more orderly than life's hesitations, almost resembling an essay. Especially when characters define two or three legal distinctions and their ethical meanings in a single conversation, the critic must ask whether this is spontaneous character speech or the author's conceptual arrangement. The novel is enriched by its educative purpose, but art does not always require the clarity of a textbook.

7.4 Multilingual India and the Maithili Centre

The setting is not confined to Darbhanga: the narrative extends to Delhi, Jodhpur, Ahmedabad, Ludhiana, Chandigarh, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and the Andamans. Rafiq's Urdu signature, Rajasthan's language of land, Punjab's register of workers, and digital commerce in the city are distinct manifestations of linguistic and regional realities. The refusal to treat variations of script or pronunciation as evidence of wrongdoing becomes an affirmation of multilingual citizenship.

The literary audacity of creating so many Indian regions through a Maithili text is notable. One possible criticism is that the speech of characters from many regions sometimes merges into a common explanatory Maithili register, reducing the distinctive character of local idioms. Yet making the narrative accessible to its readers is itself a literary decision.

7.5 The Registers of Grief and Irony

In the episodes involving Sāyrā, Sudhā, Mādhavī, Chandā, Tārābāī, Rānī, and Arjun, the language of suffering is deliberately restrained. After scenes of grave distress the author often places a small object before the reader: bread, a receipt, a pencil, the next date requested, or the line of a drawing. Compassion consequently becomes not the reward for a sermon but an experience of life continuing.

Yet grief is sometimes quickly absorbed into the explicit clarity of legal dialogue. More extended literary attention to the victim's apparently pointless waiting, anger, bewilderment, or defeat might have made the novel more uneven and more tragic. To identify that possibility is not to deny its value; it is to indicate its aesthetic horizon.

8. Verification of Legal and Historical Contexts

8.1 The Two Distinct Truths of Law and Fiction

The novel narrates fictional lives against a background of historical events. The dates of actual statutes and judgments can be verified; that verification does not establish the reality of the defendants, cross-examinations, judges, sums of money, or orders invented in the novel. The author's "Literary Notice" makes this distinction clear from the outset. Such integrity is essential to legal criticism, since the work's central theme is itself the defence of the limits of evidence.

8.2 The Right to Information and Economic Crime

The Right to Information Act, 2005 came fully into force on 12 October 2005, although certain provisions had taken effect earlier [S2]. The 2005 setting of Chapter 9 is therefore consistent with the actual historical period. The

Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 and its rules came into operation on 1 July 2005 [S3]. The language of time-bound trusts, financial records, and investigation in Chapter 10 is situated against this changing legal background. Whether a particular fictional character's act is criminal must be determined by evidence of that act, not by the commencement date of a statute alone.

8.3 Skill, Chance, and Games Involving Money

The Supreme Court of India decided State of Andhra Pradesh v. K. Satyanarayana on 22 November 1967; the published record also bears the year 1968. The judgment considered the predominance of skill in rummy, while allegations of unlawful stakes or illicit gain in particular circumstances may demand separate evidence [S4]. Dr. K. R. Lakshmanan v. State of Tamil Nadu (12 January 1996) considered the test of skill in horse-racing [S5]. In the first chapter and subsequent disputes over games, the refusal to treat these earlier precedents as the automatic legalisation of a wider illicit financial enterprise is significant.

The Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025 (Act No. 32 of 2025) came into existence in August 2025 [S9]. According to a government notification dated 22 April 2026, its effective date was fixed as 1 May 2026; the associated rules also took effect in May 2026 [S10]. It would be unsound to assume that earlier judgments concerning skill and chance and the scope of this new legislation have identical legal consequences. Chapter 33's distinctions among games, prohibitions on money-based gaming services, and familial loss engage with these outside references. The decision in the novel's fictional proceedings remains a work of narrative imagination.

8.4 Privacy, Electoral Finance, and the New Codes

In Justice K. S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India, decided on 24 August 2017, the Supreme Court recognised privacy as a fundamental right [S6]. Chapter 21's discussion of data, identity, and dignity is placed against this public legal debate. In its decision of 15 February 2024 concerning electoral bonds, the Supreme Court held the scheme and related amendments unconstitutional; the right to information and financial transparency were central questions [S7]. The examination of lists in Chapter 29 is related to such critical reading of public sources. No specific fictional character's liability or crime is established by the actual judgment.

Major provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam came into effect on 1 July 2024 [S8]. The structure of Chapter 31, "New Codes, Old Accusations," raises a real problem of legal transition: the date of the alleged offence, transitional arrangements, applicable procedure, and governing rules must be considered separately. A literary review does not purport to deliver a final judicial determination of the application of particular provisions to an individual.

8.5 Science, Disaster, and Examinations

The devastating impact of the tsunami of 26 December 2004 on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is documented in government disaster-management records [S16]. Against this historical background, Sudhā's boat register and the story of her family provide the human perspective of fictional characters. According to ISRO, Chandrayaan-3 was launched on 14 July 2023 and successfully landed on the Moon on 23 August 2023 [S11]. Chapter 28 joins this history to local questions of science education.

In the Supreme Court's detailed decision concerning NEET-UG 2024, leakage of examination papers at certain centres was accepted as a fact, but the available material was held insufficient to meet the threshold for ordering the entire examination to be repeated [S17]. Against this background, Chapter 30's separation of the national examination controversy, an individual student's marks, and a local coaching centre's fee dispute appears carefully drawn.

9. Limitations, Objections, and Possibilities of Rereading

9.1 The Density of Legal Information versus Narrative Freedom

One of the work's major literary achievements—demonstrating the significance of extremely fine legal distinctions—can also become a limitation. The distinctions among custody, bail, and conviction; allegation, direct evidence, and specific relief; and original digital material, an exported copy, and a cropped image are repeatedly explained. Readers acquire knowledge, but a final paragraph of cross-examination may occasionally arrest the emotional flow of the story. More room for a character's silence, incomplete relationships, or psychological disagreement could have enriched the narrative technique at such points.

This objection requires careful weighing before any verdict is reached: in accordance with its own conception, the novel also constructs an extensive, historically situated form of civic education. To treat informational density as an unqualified defect would therefore be unjust. The question is when legal clarity grows out of the story, and when the story becomes a means of carrying legal exposition.

9.2 The Expanding Network of Characters and the Plausibility of Their Connections

Many characters, institutions, and cases in Darbhanga, Delhi, Jodhpur, Ludhiana, Mumbai, and the Andamans periodically become connected through Revatī or other familiar relationships. The device gives breadth to the representation of Indian social reality, but demands considerable work of memory from the reader. The numerous names, different people sharing a surname, and intervals of several years may create confusion.

From an editorial standpoint, a detailed list of characters, a separate map of legal proceedings, and a brief chronology at the opening of each volume would be useful. For a scholar reading the whole original work, such reference tools would aid reading rather than substitute for the narrative's beauty.

9.3 An Excess of Moral Agreement

The novel depicts conscientious judgment among many institutional characters. Dīnānāth accepts the limits of suspicion; Śivanārāyaṇ refuses to declare something true before evidence has been produced; Revatī avoids convenient advocacy; Nūr issues corrections; and Riddhi preserves earlier versions. This pervasive ethical discipline contains an attractive optimism. Yet at the end of many decisive conversations the participants arrive at similarly cautious and reasonable conclusions.

Greater diversity of lived realities—an entrenched interest in abuses of power, persistent ideological disagreement, an ethical failure on the protagonist's part, or an unavoidable failure of the court—could at times have intensified the clash of voices. The criticism questions not the author's careful moral purpose, but the possibilities of greater artistic variety.

9.4 Questions of Politics and Social Structure

The work presents several perspectives on national events, but does not appear to aim at a complete history of specific political parties or a definitive political-economic judgment. The bank queue in Chapter 20, the farmers' movement in Chapter 26, and electoral finance in Chapter 29 derive their importance from ordinary citizens' experiences and the ethics of evidence. Yet the critic must ask how far the institutional inequalities of class, caste, region, and power can be altered by the proper conduct of particular individuals.

The novel's answer is partial: a written reply, a copy, a correction, or limited judicial relief increases a person's independence, but profound economic inequality is not eliminated by a receipt. The narrative repeatedly leaves this contradiction unresolved. Critical evaluation becomes richer when the contradiction is placed neither in the simplistic category of a flaw nor in that of a complete solution.

9.5 The Genre-Specific Limits of 2027 as Future Time

The publication details of the original book specify "First Edition 2027," and the narrative describes judicial events taking place in 2027. As of 10 November 2026, this is still a future period from the reader's present. It would therefore be improper to treat the fictional orders, special leave petitions, or banking consequences of 2027 as predictions of real outcomes, legal conclusions, or historical claims. Fiction set in the future only offers literary reflection on the possible human significance of contemporary disputes.

Because of this specific limitation, the novel should be understood neither as a factual future history nor merely as an exercise in judicial speculation. It asks not so much "What might the country become next year?" as "What does it mean for the process of making decisions to remain fair?"

10. Close Reading of Selected Passages

"Write 'I do not know' for what you do not know."

In this short sentence from Chapter 1, the discipline of knowledge becomes a literary value. A conventional mystery encourages readers to demand certainty about what is unknown; here the principle is reversed: the unknown must not immediately be converted into an accusation. The three columns on Revatī's page become the intellectual method of the next twenty-seven years.

"The court has not decided that yet."

Śivanārāyaṇ's careful answer to Amreś's question, "Is Father a thief?", is more than a legal formula. The frightened child demands an immediate resolution, but the adult's answer remains limited. This incompleteness of feeling gives the scene its force.

"Papers cannot bring a person back."

When Sudhā makes this statement and then explains the need for the boat register, compassion and rights are joined in the same moment. Written evidence cannot restore a life that has been lost, but it can protect memory from public oblivion. This is a principal poetic effect of Chapter 7.

"A clear answer need not be a short answer."

Amreś's response in Chapter 8 can also be read as a statement about the author's technique. A mixed judgment of conviction and acquittal resists "justice in a single sentence." Readers relinquish both the saintly and demonic images of the protagonist and accept the plurality of evidence.

"A written name alone does not make a person."

Recalled in the last volume, this maxim travels from a dead person's name in the first ledger through five hundred digital entries to Arjun's living rights. A name is a means of conferring civic recognition, not a substitute for the authentic identification of a human being. The return of the maxim makes the narrative simultaneously progressive and circular.

"Hearing what you have to say is not anyone's favour; it is a question of due process."

The register of this sentence in the final chapter is decisive. Revatī moves justice from the sphere of moral charity into that of institutional responsibility. The helpless family at the beginning of the novel gradually acquires the right to ask questions.

11. Critical Conclusion

The literary value of BHARAT 2027 lies neither solely in the breadth of its events nor in its countless legal references. Its fundamental achievement is to shift the history of modern India away from the simple question "Who won?" towards "Who was heard?", "Who wrote about whom?", "Who decided what a document meant?", and "Who received a chance to correct a mistake?" In this sense, it is at once a legal-social novel, a critique of the archive, and an ethical narrative of citizenship.

The broad compass of its five volumes allows many themes to coexist. Revatī's gradual intellectual maturity binds the narrative at the personal level; Nīlakānt's mixed verdict dismantles the myth of the protagonist as saint; Sudhā's loss at sea reveals the human limits of evidence; Kusum's land, Sunītā's wages, Manasvī's identity, Tārābāī's examination, and Arjun's fees disclose different relationships between judicial procedure and life. The author's craft shines especially where an ordinary object—a tin of bread, a stone from a well, a receipt stamp, a sealed envelope, or a declined bank payment—becomes a visible embodiment of complex social truth.

The work's limitations are equally apparent. Extended judicial exposition makes many conversations resemble highly ordered explanations; the characters' ideological consistency sometimes reduces the disorder of actual life; and the profusion of names and events across five volumes severely tests the reader's memory. Keeping these limitations in mind, the best way to read the novel is not as an action-driven prosecution story but with the patience appropriate to a social novel spanning many decades.

At its close, the story returns to the veranda of the district court, showing a new petitioner how to ask questions, present evidence, demand a reasoned order, and lodge a proper appeal. This ending is not a miraculous solution but an inheritance of civic skills. The meaning of twenty-seven years of testimony lies not only in a verdict on the past but in the just possibility of future hearings.

12. Specific Questions for Future Research

- How might a formal narratological map be constructed of three clocks: Revatī's narrative time, her father's bus ticket, and the country's historical years?

- Through what sequence does the meaning of "name" change across the five volumes—from a dead person, to a land register, a woman's identity, a digital list, and a bank account?

- How differently do the characters deploy linguistic strategies against direct testimony and altered digital material?

- To what extent do the novel's women move from being the objects of evidence to independent interpreters of their own circumstances?

• What contemporary social effects might follow from the use of modern scientific and financial-legal terminology in Maithili?

• How is the boundary drawn between the relevance of actual public history and the autonomy of fictional courtroom incidents?

• If the proportion of dramatic scenes to legal exposition were measured chapter by chapter, in which volumes would the artistic pace prove faster or slower?

• What new concept of judicial realism might a comparative study of partial relief, remaining injury, and open endings yield?

Appendix 1: Map of All Forty Chapters

Chapter numbers, titles, and opening pages as given in the sequence of the original manuscript. This list has been prepared to facilitate textual verification in this review and citation by future researchers.

Chapter	Title	Original page
1	The Magistrate's Chamber	1
2	The Seizure List	22
3	The Shadow of Parliament	42
4	Land in the Desert	62
5	The One Whose House Burned	81
6	The Home of the Silent Witness	101
7	The Catastrophe at Sea	120
8	The First Judgment	139
9	The First Right to Information	159
10	The New Law against Money Laundering	179
11	A Second Record of the Desert	199
12	Chandrayaan and the Accused	219
13	The Workers' Unpaid Wages	240
14	The Platform of a People's Movement	261
15	A Woman Becomes a Witness	282
16	A Question before the High Court	303
17	The Bargain within the Game	324
18	The Road to Mars and the Right to Identity	345
19	A Sentence Written on the Screen	366
20	The Last Night of Cash	388
21	In the Name of Privacy	409
22	The Many Meanings of Dignity	431
23	Darkness on the Moon, Questions in the Valley	452
24	Closed Courts, Open Suffering	474
25	The Price of Breath	496
26	A Voice Raised in the Name of the Fields	517
27	The Test of Crime and Bail	539

Chapter	Title	Original page
28	The Light of Chandrayaan	562
29	The Record of Electoral Money	584
30	Who Stole the Examination Questions?	607
31	New Codes, Old Allegations	630
32	The University's Closed Room	652
33	The New Law on Gambling	676
34	The Ledger of Five Hundred Names	698
35	The Account Is Frozen	721
36	The Special Court's Hard Questions	745
37	Twenty-Seven Years in the High Court	767
38	The Cost of Falsehood	790
39	Before the Supreme Court	812
40	The District Court Veranda	835

Appendix 2: Principal Concepts Used in the Critique

Primary text — The complete forty-chapter manuscript supplied by the author; it is the principal evidence for events represented in the narrative.

Textual evidence — An event, dialogue, or description expressly stated in a chapter, kept distinct from the critic's inference.

Focalisation — The limits of a character's experience or knowledge through which the narrator presents a scene.

Narrative time — The arrangement of years, narrative pace, memory, and anticipation within the story.

Chain of custody — The sequence by which the source, preservation, transfer, and authentication of an object or digital record can be established.

Epistemic injustice — The unjust diminution of a person's knowledge or testimony because of social prejudice or unequal power.

Intertextual history — The relation of fictional incidents to actual public years or legal contexts without equating those incidents with historical events.

Limited relief — Judicial relief granted in a particular dispute, not a final moral or legal resolution of all allegations.

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A PARALLEL HISTORY OF MITHILĀ & MAITHILĪ LITERATURE

PART IV · TOME XI

“The Parallel is not the marginal, but the truthful, in long delay.”

Tome XI reads Maithili literature as a living, many-voiced tradition — from the stage to the street, from the manuscript to the screen. It opens with the medieval farce *Dhūrtasamāgama* and the musical drama *Prabhāvatīharaṇa*, examined through their songs, dialogue and staging, then moves through close studies of the novels *Agnivaṃśa*, *The City's Other Face* and *Bharat 2027*. The *Nit Naval* appreciations turn to representative Maithili writers, attending to folk life, women's voices, caste and labour, theatre, song and lullaby.

INSIDE THIS TOME

- The farce, the musical drama and a comparative critical appraisal
- Three novels in critical focus: *Agnivaṃśa* · *The City's Other Face* · *Bharat 2027*
- *Nit Naval*: Kailash Kumar Mishra · Rajdev Mandal · Ramdev Prasad Mandal ‘Jhāṛūdār’ · Anand Kumar Jha · Sandeep Kumar Safi · Lallan Prasad Thakur · Prabhas Kumar Chaudhary

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